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THE ONE HOUR SERIES

AN HOUR OF AMERICAN POETRY

By

CHARLES EDWARD RUSSELL

PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
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1929

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AN HOUR OF AMERICAN POETRY

PREFATORY NOTE

FIRST of all, we should seek some agreement as to the nature of the thing we are to talk about in this little book. At once arises difficulty. In all the language, poetry is the word most loosely defined. To view together the current usages about it is to see that poetry means anything pleasing from Isaac Watts to a steam engine. Books and authorities help nothing. I have here a gleaning of definitions by a wide range of lexicographers and oracles of varying eminence from which, if one tried to take them all seriously, one would arise with swimming head. Twenty-three in number they are, all different, and most of them irreconcilable. The truth seems to be that there is no such thing as a generally recognized or recognizable definition of poetry. Probably none need be expected, for the basic reason (with others) that poetry being in the end a matter of emotional reaction in the mysterious inner dwelling place of man, and no two reactions being identical, every man consciously or unconsciously makes his own definition; just as consciously or unconsciously he bears and applies his own standards.

Let whatsoever beetling brow of wisdom tell him he ought to like this or that, and, if he likes it not, still he likes it not. Say that for reasons of timidity or diffidence he pretends acquiescence; in his heart his liking or disliking persists in the face of thundering Jove as of jeering Zoilus.

Nevertheless, here is that strait necessity to agree in some way about the dimensions of the subject before discoursing upon it. For the purpose of the treatise in hand the present compiler has taken as a guiding definition that of Edmund Clarence Stedman, slightly modified.

"Poetry," said Stedman, "is rhythmical, imaginative language expressing the invention, taste, thought, passion and insight of the human soul."

But language that without hesitation is classed as prose is often rhythmical, though not in the accredited rhythms of music. Every day are printed tons upon tons of such language, and, as much of it is highly imaginative, it seemed needful to draw more closely the strings of definition.

Next, as there is a certain fixed and always discernible difference between the rhythms of prose and the rhythms of poetry, this dif-

ference might well be made clear. Hoping always not to alarm non-musicians, I may still point out that the basis of all accepted poetry in our language, from the Moral Gower and Father Chaucer to our own time, has been a definite rhythm of music. Most of our poetry has been written in plain ordinary $\frac{3}{8}$ time; that is to say, in a regular time-bar of the equivalent of three eighth notes. Where this is not the case, another time-bar is used of the regular and recognized order of music; usually $\frac{2}{4}$ time, or a time-bar having the equivalent of two quarter notes. For instance, what is called iambic pentameter blank verse as used by Shakespeare and hundreds of others is a line of $\frac{3}{8}$ time-bars beginning with a rest and an eighth note and ending usually in a quarter note and a rest. This being as certain as anything can be in this fleeting world, demanded some recognition in any definition we might decide to favor here.

Next, of course it is not really the thought, invention, taste, and so on, of the poet that is expressed. Whatever may be supposed about his processes, he is not trying to express but to

transfer or convey. And what he seeks to transfer is not his invention or taste or passion but the feelings that pertain to these. The poet deals with feelings, not with ratiocination. It is not scenery that he transfers but the feeling of it. It is not a man that he transfers but the feeling that pertains to the man-image he has in mind. Even in didactic verse, if it is poetry, the poet transfers not the thought but the feeling belonging to or aroused by that thought. For these reasons, it seemed well to change the definition so as to make it read, poetry is imaginative language in an ordered rhythm of time-bars and transferring a feeling.

The feeling sought to be transferred is most often of or akin to beauty but need not be either. No one can pretend that there is any beauty in King Lear, Act III, Sc. 7, lines 67-90, or in a hundred other passages in the old metrical drama; but no one has moved or ever will move to exclude them from poetry.

Note should be made that the amendment is not offered under a mad delusion that it meets in any degree the difficulties about definition. It is used here because it seemed to be the only delimitation that would work.

The space allotted to sketch the rise and

progress of poetic art in America is small. Within its bounds could be not even a mention of scores of poets of noble achievements that have made the art glorious in America. Selection was forced and not always on a basis of absolute merit, but choosing those that seemed either to have moved the evolution or typified some phase of it. If, therefore, readers look in vain for citation of a favorite author, the lesion does not mean light esteem but the terms of the problem in hand.

One other thing. The fashion of the day is all for detraction. In nothing has it been more sharply shown than in a common disparagement of all that pertains to the country in which we live. Once rather shamefully and, no doubt, extravagantly, rebuked for boasting, we have now gone to the other extreme and assume that whatever bears our name must be despicable, or, at best, specked and flawed. Most of all, in matters relating to any form of art. To the just mind, one of these excesses is as bad as the other. There is no wish in this little book to resurrect the overworked spectre of Nicolas Chauvin, but the simple fact is that in lyrical poetry, particularly within the last thirty years, the output in America has been in volume and in average of quality most unusual. Next to

orchestral music, poetry is America's best achievement in art.

In a nation so busy and by common consent so materialistic, this seems something to wonder at. That under the granitic outside glitter of American life are curious springs of feeling and idealism every careful observer knows well enough, though the rest of the world hears of these things only at intervals and then with doubting. What has not been so well noted is the growing probability, shown in the history of orchestral music, that with the capacity for human sympathy and help is another latent capacity for enduring greatness in art.

Therefore, the story of the growth of poetry in America, from the simple wayside spring in the days of the Revolution to the present broad stream of strength and dignity, seemed worth following even in a tract so brief as this.

The plan of the book precludes discussion of poets that being still with us may be happily believed not to have completed their work; but a note is made of what seems to be, so far as it is discernible, the present tendency of our poetry.

Chapter One

FRENEAU OF THE REVOLUTION

A NATIONAL poetry springs first from a national emotion. Its seedtime is a national crisis; its best growing weather the memory thereof. Whatever philosophers may hope or dreamers imagine, its sunlight indispensable is a sense of national independence. Colonies may produce other things; they do not produce great literature. Acknowledged or latent, the colonial spirit is an inferiority complex and deadly to song.

The beginning of poetry in America was the outbreak of the Revolution; independence was declared in more ways than political. Those crucial years that followed had something of the effect upon the adolescent American mind that the Persian wars had upon Greece or the Armada upon the Elizabethan. Up to that time, versifying in America, if any, had been chiefly in the way of hymnody and toadying; devout, conformable, timid, unutterably dull. When the hand-to-hand struggle for freedom burst upon men of any poetic urge, they had something worth while to sing about, and that rock being struck with

a flint rifle, out came a flood of ballads, songs and satirical verse truly astonishing for vigor, feeling, and even, speaking not too curiously, for merit. The passions of that day reflected in these offerings must have been much deeper than modern estimate has surmised; and we have here a new reason for the study of poetry in that it is a sure index of the life that gives it birth.

There is no better way to gauge the intellectual ferment that came with the Revolution than to compare its poetry with the dismal output of the colonial period—the pious Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672), for example. Acclaimed in England as "The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America," she dealt exclusively in dreary commonplace like this from her poem about Queen Elizabeth:

> 'Mongst hundred hecatombs of roaring verse,
> Mine bleating stands before thy royal hearse.
> Thou never didst nor canst thou now disdain
> To accept the tribute of a loyal brain;
> Thy clemency did erst esteem as much
> The acclamations of the poor as rich.

The halting numbers of Benjamin Thompson (1642-1714) have been viewed as American because they dealt with local themes, "New England's Crisis," "New England's Tears," and so on. It is a violent con-

clusion. Poet Thompson's measures were provincial and imitative as well as club-footed.

Philip Freneau (1752-1832), David Humphreys (1752-1818), Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), and St. George Tucker (1752-1828), the earliest pioneers in a genuine American poetry, were conspicuously and directly sons of the Revolution. Dwight was a chaplain in the American army, Tucker a lieutenant colonel, Freneau a daring and incurable blockade runner that tasted for his efforts the mercies of a British prison ship, Humphreys a lieutenant colonel and favorite aide of Washington. These are names that stand out of a general condition. Other poets may have sung as tunefully but chanced not to hit with their songs or their names the target of enduring fame. One has only to turn over the hot specimens preserved in that venerable work Watson's "Camp Fires of the Revolution" to see that this is so. Or do but scan the rattling old sea ballad "The Yankee Man-of-War" that goes like a clipper ship and will be sung in the American navy as long as the country has anything afloat. In all these relics a tense and often fine feeling sings with rush and verve.

In 1778, when the contest had been on but

three years, the Reverend Wheeler Case of Dutchess County, New York, made a collection entitled: "Poems, Occasioned by several circumstances and occurrences in the Present Grand Contest of America for Liberty, published in New Haven." Conspicuous in this little anthology is a Sapphic Ode by Nathaniel Niles, A.M., called "The American Hero," of which the animating feeling may be judged from these closing stanzas:

Fame and dear freedom *lure* me on to battle,
While a fell despot, grimmer than a death's head,
Stings me with serpents, fiercer than Medusa's,
To the encounter.

Life, for my country and the cause of freedom,
Is but a trifle for a worm to part with;
And if preserved in so great a contest,
Life is redoubled.
(Norwich, Conn.,
Oct. 1775)

Women poets enlisted with their pens in the same cause. Mercy Warren, a sister of James Otis, wrote anti-monarchical satires of a highly acidulous character, and dedicated a volume of her Revolutionary verse to Washington. Elizabeth Graeme, writer and translator of poetics, left her husband because he turned Tory. Susannah Haswell, who wrote "Charlotte Temple," wrote also "The Standard of Liberty."

It is to be noted with care and remembered throughout these considerations that the crisis passes but its stimulus goes on and spreads, losing, for a time at least, none of its virtue. Men begin to sing about the peril of the moment, but they keep on singing of many things. Freneau was moved to a jubilate over Greene's victory at Eutaw Springs; then he was moved to sing with power and feeling on themes as far away from war as "The Wild Honeysuckle," "To a Honey Bee," and "On the Ruins of a Country Inn." It was so in analogous periods of other nations' troubles. Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were at work long after the last Persian ship was among the coral; the Armada was five years vanished when Marlowe wrote his "Edward the Second"; and the French Revolution was of another generation when Hugo signaled the summit of its intellectual renaissance.

Freneau was a figure so fascinating and imposing that the national neglect of him is beyond understanding. In another country he would have been a second Jean Bart. His career, his character, and his output would have cast honor upon any people of his times, and his biography would read like a novel. He was born in New York (although New

York has comfortably overlooked the fact), graduated at Princeton College, and showed in his commencement performance something of the stuff whereof he was made; for even then the sense of nationality must have been more than rudimentary in him. With a fellow student, he wrote and delivered a metrical dialogue on "The Rising Glory of America," year of grace 1771. Four years later the war came, and at once he began to pour out a torrent of appeal, invective and expostulation in poetry and prose, showing for biting satire and free-flowing versification an unimpeachable gift. He was a type of that glowing, ardent, adorable youth that helped so much to make the Revolution memorable, picturesque, and great. For some reason he took to the sea, where as a first-class navigator and able commander he rendered his country good service. "The British Prison Ship" in four fierce cantos not only flays his captors, no doubt with a reasonable provocation, but intimates a profound contempt for their seamanship.

When the war was over, he took up journalism and was first the editor of the *Daily Advertiser* of New York and then of the *National Gazette* of Philadelphia. After that he went seafaring again, apparently because

of thirst for adventure. In 1812 he came finally to anchor near Monmouth, New Jersey, where he lived in an atmosphere of poetry and occasionally one of peace until 1832. A more indomitable spirit never lived; no portrait would do him justice that did not show him drawn sword in hand. He protested in verse against everything he thought wrong, from lapses in the new Constitution to the British barbarisms at Washington in 1814, which he denounced with furious invective. From time to time he published fresh volumes of his verse and each might have been regarded as a metrified stormy petrel if it had not also held forth poems of nature in which he showed a surprising spirit of communion and sweetness. Princeton's final collection of his works published in 1902 in three volumes gives a total of 282 titles.

He had a way of his own, even when he followed accepted form.

> 'Tis not the beauty of the morn
> That proves the evening shall be clear,

and he struck firmly what was to be a dominant note in the great body of poetic art of which he was the forerunner and beginner. He found in the woods and ways of the half-

wilderness, close to which he was born, the aspects of nature that suited his spirit. His "To a Wild Honeysuckle" was the starting of a growth of nature poetry destined to proportions of glory. Thus it begins:

> Fair flower, that dost so comely grow,
> Hid in this silent, dull retreat,
> Untouched thy honied blossoms blow,
> Unseen thy little branches greet:
> No roving foot shall crush thee here,
> No busy hand provoke a tear.

"To get money and culture with both hands and the same irrational fervor" is one wise alien's version of what he deemed the chief American trait. This baffling phenomenon is of more than merely respectable antiquity—these showings of the spirit that promotes huge business enterprises and builds overwhelming art galleries. The germ of it is plain in David Humphreys, who, as a manufacturer, introduced the woolen industry in America and, as a poet, wrote sonnets (fourteeners) of pith and melody. He also embodied the peculiar, restless American versatility, for he was successively schoolmaster, tutor, soldier, officer in the Revolutionary Army, counsellor, diplomat, the friend of princes, and an excellent farmer. His poems went through several printings,

being collected in 1804 in a memorial edition subscribed for by the King and Queen of Spain, Prime Minister of Portugal, the President, the ex-President, and a long list of notables on both sides of the Atlantic. His work was of a firmer texture and better polish than Freneau's, but lacked Freneau's free spirit and intimate friendship with Mother Earth. The best of his twelve sonnets is his graceful tribute to his Alma Mater, Yale College, Class 1771. Others were on patriotic themes written in a high vein of that intelligent devotion to a vital cause that inspired so many other young men of his day. There is a touch of the romantic, odd in so busy a man, in his translation from the French, "The Shepherd: A Song," beginning:

> It rains, it rains, my fair,
> Come drive your white sheep fast:
> To shelter quick repair,
> Haste, shepherdess, make haste.
> I hear—the water pours,
> With patt'ring on the vines:
> See here! See here! it lours—
> See there the lightning shines.

He also wrote "Mt. Vernon: An Ode," done in Washington's house August, 1786, "By broad Potowmack's azure tide."

One year, 1752, saw the birth of these four founders of American verse, but their ways of life, much affected by the Revolution, differed greatly. So did their product. Dwight, who is best remembered as a theologian and as President of Yale, fancied the didactic. His longest poem, "The Conquest of Canaan," ran to 363 pages and eleven books, written in heroic couplets after the Georgian style. Probably nobody but his own kin and kind ever read it. But his "Greenfield Hill," a poem in seven parts, has diversity of measure, some excellent picturing and a lively description of the burning of Fairfield by the British. It contains this, with other patriotic climaxes:

> With wisdom, virtue and the generous love
> Of learning fraught and freedom's living flame,
> Electric, unextinguishable, fir'd,
> Our Sires established, in thy cheerful bounds,
> The noblest institutions man has seen
> Since time his reign began.

St. George Tucker, who was a lawyer and after his services in the war rose to great eminence in his profession, is best remembered for his graceful and tender lines beginning:

> Days of my youth,
> Ye have glided away;

Hairs of my youth,
Ye are frosted and gray,

still sometimes quoted. He left a large body of verse that has never been printed. Of the army of other versifiers of the Revolution, John Trumbull, with his swinging satirical "M'Fingal," and Joel Barlow with his ponderous "Columbiad" still cling to the library shelves but have scarcely another vogue, though "M'Fingal" was revived and reprinted in 1881. It begins with these daunting couplets worthy of Burns's *Macpherson* himself:

When Yankies, skill'd in martial rule,
First put the British troops to school;
Instructed them in warlike trade,
And new manœuvres of parade;
The true war-dance of Yanky-reels,
And manual exercise of heels;
Made them give up, like saints complete,
The arm of flesh and trust the feet,
And work, like Christians undissembling,
Salvation out, by fear and trembling;
Taught Percy fashionable races,
And modern modes of Chevy-chaces—

Barlow's once famous work does not quite start with the fall of man, but might almost as well have done so. It is a history of America from the sailing of Columbus to the au-

thor's own day, in eight thousand lines rhymed.

One other, Francis Hopkinson, deserves a more extended notice. In 1926, the University of Chicago Press published an elaborate volume by George Everett Hastings, entitled "The Life and Works of Francis Hopkinson," in which the unusual character and attainments of this early singer were treated in a way at once scholarly, appreciative, and engaging. Hopkinson was the first American composer, and his lyrics, set to his own music, were roared up and down the Revolutionary camps from Machias to Ninety-Six. His son, Joseph, was the author of "Hail Columbia," written to still the political squabbles of the day by recalling forcibly to men's minds the sacrifices and triumphs of the Revolution. One stanza bears a striking resemblance to a passage in his father's oratorio, "The Temple of Minerva." The father was a restless patriot, publicist, reformer, musician, and satirist, his "Battle of the Kegs" being much the most famous satire of the day. In the second of the manuscript volumes owned by the Edward E. Huntington Library are many of Hopkinson's Revolutionary songs not included in his published works.

The first successors of this earliest group

were born near enough to the epochal struggle to imbibe its atmosphere and be quickened by its memories; John Quincy Adams, indeed far enough back to remember the Declaration and its signing. Clement C. Moore, of the "Visit from St. Nicholas," which has survived more manhandling than any other verse written by an American, was born in 1779, a year that saw the birth of Francis Scott Key, James Kirke Paulding, and Washington Allston, three worthy track-breakers in singing and making. Thomas Hastings was born in 1784, Samuel Woodworth, who wrote so tunefully and well about the old oaken bucket, was born in 1785, Richard Henry Dana in 1787, and James A. Hillhouse in 1789.

Hillhouse might almost be called the first American dramatist, since he was the first American to write a metrical play that had or deserved serious attention. His "Hada," appearing in 1839, is an oriental story unfolded with considerable power. As for its versification, take a short sample:

> *Had.* He bade me look on ragged Caucasus,
> Crag piled on crag beyond the utmost ken
> Naked, and wild, as if creation's ruins
> Were heaped in one immeasurable chain
> Of barren mountains, beaten by the storms
> Of everlasting winter. But within

Are glorious palaces, and domes of light,
Irradiate halls, and crystal colonades,
Blazing with lustre past the noontide beam,
Or, with a milder beauty, mimicking
The mystic signs of changeful Mazzaroth.

That singular figure, John Quincy Adams, had with his other gifts an undeniable command over the making of apt and pointed verse, the more that it had a quaintly humorous turn, dry maybe, and New Englandish, but still dainty and good. One thing about him—he could make verse ripple, a knack most of the singers of his time never dreamed of, for these were the days of unleavened bread in this art. A versatile man, it is easy to surmise that if he had given to poetry half the serious attention he gave to public affairs, he would have infallibly marked the literature of the country he served so well in other ways.

Allston's place in art has nearly erased his work as a poet, but he proved again what has been still more underscored in later times, that if poetry is twinned with music on one side, it is own sister to painting on the other. His amatory and didactic verse has often the compelling glimpse of a visible scene.

When in these days of full-toned and high-flighted song the investigator arrives upon

such offerings as we have been here mentioning, certain observations are to be made. The quality, to our modern taste, does not seem much; we are accustomed to more head upon our poetic liquor. But frigid artificiality was the fashion of the age; it is wonderful that so many American poets got so far away from it. Next, while the form and often the manner may seem imitative, underneath the national spirit was beginning to show itself in three plain manifestations. There was an attitude toward nature that could come only in a nation that lived close to the soil and that soil still largely virgin. There was an appreciation, tending to enhance itself, of the individuality and separate destiny of America. And there was that peculiar dry humor that is the persistent, inexplicable by-product of American life.

The religious element dominated more or less the serious part of the output. Thomas Hastings wrote hymns that are still sung in the churches, Dana's "Immortality" is comparable to Wordsworth's ode, the poems of Sarah Josepha Hale, one of the first American women that won distinction with their pens, breathe much of piety; but what was almost as discernible was a tendency to deal

with native themes in a native manner. Woodworth's everlasting "Bucket" is an example of this, perfect and significant. No English poet up to that time, certainly, would have chosen such a subject nor handled it with such democratic and delicious freedom.

That moss-covered vessel I hailed as a treasure,
For often at noon, when returned from the field,
I found it the source of an exquisite pleasure,
The purest and sweetest that nature can yield.
How ardent I seized it, with hands that were glowing,
etc.

A man must live in a land fairly free from snobbery to write like this and be sure of an admiring audience. A sign of the times—most of the men that he addressed had themselves tossed hay amid lowly beginnings of which they saw no reason to be ashamed. "That is one advantage of being an American," says Stevenson. It was manifested in our early days perhaps even more clearly than now, the state of society with little caste and much candor concerning origins. If Woodworth's happy stanzas had not been so assiduously drilled into youthful ears, they would still be of the first esteem, for the reason that their music is so excellent. The lines sing themselves, and the clever manage-

ment of the refrain struck a new note in what may be called without disrespect the mechanics of verse.

All kinds of men and women wrote verses. Among statesmen, for instance, not alone John Quincy Adams, afterward President of the United States, but even stern-faced Daniel Webster. Richard Henry Wilde was a lawyer; so was Hopkinson; so was Dana; so was Key. William Martin Johnson was a physician, Hillhouse a merchant, John Pierpont a clergyman, Moore a teacher. A few appear as men of letters, notably Paulding, who was one of our first novelists. James Fenimore Cooper turned sometimes from following his Mohicans and battering the local press to write verse, sea verse, and showed that he could make a ballad go as swiftly as a story.

One of these lights of our earlier days was Fitz-Greene Halleck, born in Guilford, Connecticut, in 1790, of the straightest old American stock, John Eliot being one of his ancestors. His life exhibited another phase of the American situation, for while his schooling did not go beyond what would now be counted as ninth grade grammar, he became by his own efforts and indefatigable reading

a learned man. He was only fifteen when he began to make his own way as a clerk in a country store and only twenty-one when he launched himself upon New York. By day he was an accountant or book-keeper; by night a diligent student and maker of verse. Literary circles were beginning to be formed in New York. A phenomenally bright-eyed young man named Drake was then wandering about, mooning and singing, and Halleck made up with him and others one of these circles. He had been but two years in the great city when he and Drake ventured upon a collaborated series of satirical papers for the *Evening Post*, and the success of these fixed Halleck's fate. He gave all his spare time to writing and the next year made a hit with a satirical poem called "Fanny." Satire had a singular vogue in those days; all the polite writers were at it. In 1825, his first serious poem and most famous, "Marco Bozzaris," appeared in the *Post* and went to something like immortality in the school readers. It has a latent place in every mind and need not be reprinted here. His first volume of collected poems came out in 1827. It showed a certain restraint that still strikes the modern inquirer with a pleased surprise.

He had also the honor to add to the world's stock of quotable phrases.

> None knew thee but to love thee,
> Nor named thee but to praise,

is in his poem on the death of his friend Drake. His combination of a sense of the beautiful with an unconquerable fondness for irony is shown in his "Connecticut."

> —— still her grey rocks tower above the sea
> That crouches at their feet, a conquered wave;
> 'Tis a rough land of earth, and stone, and tree,
> Where breathes no castled lord or cabined slave;
> Where thoughts and tongues, and hands are bold and free,
> And friends will find a welcome, foes a grave;
> And where none kneel, save when to heaven they pray,
> Nor even then, unless in their own way.

Of the connection between the emotions of a national crisis and the fabrique of a national verse, John Pierpont was a conspicuous example. Born in 1785, he came into the last echoes of the Revolutionary fervor, wrote the stirring patriotic hymn, "Warren's Address" (still, let us hope, declaimed from school platforms), and then, being swept into the anti-slavery struggle, "The Fugitive Slave's Apostrophe," that noble and melodious pæan to liberty. He was liberty's martyr as well as its assiduous singer. Because he

opposed human slavery, he was driven out of his pulpit in 1845. Boston did that, the same Boston that dragged William Lloyd Garrison through the streets with a rope around his neck and hooted Wendell Phillips across the Common; Boston of Faneuil Hall, Old South, and the memories of James Otis. At the age of seventy-six the Civil War coming on, he enlisted in the Northern army, the stout old soul. Take two stanzas of the "Apostrophe."

> Thy beam is on the glassy breast
> Of the still spring upon whose brink
> I lay my weary limbs to rest,
> And bow my parching lips to drink.
> Guide of the friendless Negro's way,
> I bless thee for this quiet ray!
>
> In the dark top of southern pines
> I nestled, when the driver's horn
> Called to the field, in lengthening lines,
> My fellows at the break of morn.
> And there I lay, till thy sweet face
> Looked in upon my hiding-place.

Joseph Rodman Drake died in his twenty-fifth year and may therefore be counted with the inheritors of unfulfilled renown, with Chatterton and David Gray. As in their cases, baffled conjecture wonders what he might have become, for his gift was large and certain. Nothing so daintily fanciful and so

musical as "The Culprit Fay" had been known since the Elizabethan Madrigals, and few of the Elizabethans produced anything of the kind that was so well sustained. Indeed, on reflection, a whole troop of Colin Clouts and Shepherd Tonys seem to trail by in wooden shoes and make an inferior melody to

'Tis the middle watch of a summer's night—
The earth is dark, but the heavens are bright;
Naught is seen in the vault on high
But the moon, and the stars, and the cloudless sky,
And the flood which rolls its milky hue,
A river of light, on the welkin blue.
The moon looks down on old Cro'nest;
She mellows the shades on his shaggy breast,
And seems his huge gray form to throw,
In a silver cone, on the wave below.

Musical analysis would show an unusual skill in the handling of these lines—in the second and third, for instance, where, musically speaking, the last note in the second line, "bright" is a quarter note followed by an eighth rest and the next line begins, lacking the anacrusis, with a quarter note—"naught." This arrangement not only gives an adequate display of emphasis to the thought, but affords a tuneful variation in the music.

He had wit, too, this amply endowed young man that died so untimely. Witness his share in "The Croakers," the satirical ambuscade that upset New York in its callow days, while his "Man Who Frets at Worldly Strife" and "Ode to Fortune" have a certain sub-acid and refreshing flavor like that of the Red Indian's wild plum.

After this, turn over the hundreds of pages that Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney filled with her mediocre metrifyings, hunt out the records of the immense and almost incredible vogue she once enjoyed, and one may think it gainsays any notion of advancing and improving taste in the new country. But we are to remember two things. The fashion of the times ran much to sentiment, thick and indiscriminate, and Mrs. Sigourney's was laid on not so much with a trowel as with a spade. Second, while she was the poetess laureate of what we now deem but solemn vacuity, she showed at times (few and far apart) a singular glint of native felicity. If in her poem to "The Sewing Machine" she sang

> What a blessed age we live in,
> Sisters, and daughters, and wives;
> With all the lights of science
> To lengthen out our lives.

And be the time thus rescued,
Not spent in folly's strife,
But fit ourselves and others
For a higher, better life—

and in her ode, "To a Shred of Linen,"

Methinks I scan
Some idiosyncrasy that marks thee out
A defunct pillow-case. Did the trim guest,
To the best chamber usher'd, e'er admire
The snowy whiteness of thy freshen'd youth,
Feeding thy vanity? or some sweet babe
Pour its pure dream of innocence upon thee?

she also wrote

Clime of the West! that, slumbering long and deep,
Beneath thy misty mountains' solemn shade,
And, lulled by melancholy winds that sweep
The unshorn forest and untrodden glade.

At her worst she had much company. That same queer mixture of sentiment and the baldly practical that is so eminently American produced about 1833 the effusions of Solyman Brown, A. M., author of the "Dentologia, a Poem on Diseases of the Teeth and Their Proper Remedies," a prodigious work in heroic couplets and five cantos. Amid much elaborate classical imagery, not at all ill-done, appear urgent pleas to go often to the dentist and detailed accounts of dental

surgery as practised in that day. A sample will suffice:

Then all these mortal woes in one were joined,
And tooth-ache came, the terror of mankind!
Thou haggard fiend! of hellish imps the worst,
To mercy deaf, by sorrowing man accurst;
Though cheerless days made desolate by thee,
And long, long nights of sleepless agony,
Have marked thy fearful reign in days of yore,
Thy power is crushed,—thy scorpion sting no more
Affrights the helpless, for the dental art
Commands thy gloomy terrors to depart,
Then wipes from beauty's cheek the tears that burn,
And bids her roses and her smiles return.

It had gone through two editions by 1840 and was solemnly commended. Some critics thought it good because it conveyed wholesome advice.

Chapter Two

BRYANT AND THE NATURISTS

POETRY'S greatest handicap in America was the fact that the new nation spoke and wrote the language of another and older that had a formulated literature and an assumption of critical prerogative. For this reason, the notable mixture of peoples and races that really made up the American venture had at first slender representation, or none. Many poets in America wrote with an eye upon English models and an unaccountable awe of English opinion, if they could obtain any. The servile attitude of mind was cultivated by many educators and by all of that slight part of the new world that was called society: also by others that should have known better. But three influences were at work more powerful than any latent snobbery that crooks the hinges of the knees before an imported tradition. One was America's remoteness; the second, the effect upon its population of the struggle with nature in the wilderness; and, third, the sure consequences of America's bold experimentation in a new theory of government and a new set of national ideals. Physi-

cally, politically, morally, and spiritually, America was not Europe transplanted, and this fact was certain to make itself felt in its literary product as in its policies.

But to be American in poetry did not necessarily mean to invent new stanzas, rhythms, forms, or epithets. Some persons have held to the contrary, but wrongly. To be American meant to have the American point of view, to express the American psychology and idealism, to reflect the peculiar American life, to deal with American themes. The charge of timid imitation thoughtlessly made against the American singers as a class is not to be suffered in patience when all the facts are considered. When William Cullen Bryant wrote in ten-syllabled blank verse (strictly speaking, $\frac{3}{8}$ time, unrhymed) he was to that extent imitating a long line of English poets—shall we say, including Mark Akenside? But each of these in turn was a rank imitator, if Bryant was one. At that rate, the Elizabethan dramatists were a bunch of copy-cats. "The man that plants cabbages imitates, too," sang Austin Dobson, moved out of his sweet spirit by these parrotings. Right was his word. When Bryant wore a hat on his head he was to that extent imita-

tive, as are you and I. One might say that any measure or form he might have chosen as the vehicle of his song had some precedent. Richard Strauss putting down his notes on a standard clef is imitating to that extent every older composer back to the sixteenth century. It was what Bryant said in this vehicle as it is what Strauss composes within his that tests originality for either. And if it is urged that Bryant used the Spenserian stanza for "The Ages," Rossetti and a thousand more have used the Guittonian!

Next, we ought not to allow ourselves to be influenced in our judgments of these men, nor in our enjoyment of their work, by any humor of the day in which we live. It is the prerogative of each generation to view its verdicts as last words; but if any experience of mankind has been unchanging it is the sight of each generation casting down the idols of the generation before it. Imagine Miss Millay writing in the reign of King Alexander Pope, and how far would she go!

We need not be concerned, next, with another fashion and assume with the detracting chorus that because Bryant was American he was bad. In any view of poetry as a representative art, as a means of transferring through rhythmical speech the feelings that

belong to things or thoughts, Bryant was a great poet, a thoroughly American poet and one that cast and still casts honor upon his native land.

His long, gentle, blameless life began at Cummington, Massachusetts, November 3, 1794, and flowed its almost unruffled way for eighty-four years. Higher education went no farther with him than a year at Williams College. His family intended him for the law, which he studied until he was admitted to the bar and then began to practise—perfunctorily. This was in 1815, when he was twenty-one. He had long been writing and dreaming in secret; three years before he had completed "Thanatopsis," and two years later he published it in the *North American Review*. Other works began to come from his pen. "The Ages" was a Phi Beta Kappa poem written in 1821 for the society at Harvard. In 1825 he went to New York and took up the life of a literary man, joining the staff of the *Evening Post*. Three years later he was the *Post's* chief editor and so continued the rest of his life, but never allowed his journalistic duties to suppress his poetic activities, culminating in the monumental translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey. The house in West Sixteenth Street in which

he lived and died was in 1929 the home of the International Typographical Union.

It is possible that Bryant was American to the temporary injury of his just fame. Certainly, foreign criticism, if that were final or important, could make little of such a poem as "The Prairies." An alien estimator could never have stood and watched those cloud shadows roll over those boundless seas of billowy grass and flowers, and therefore a picture as perfect as was ever framed in words would leave him untouched. Even "Thanatopsis" could not atone for that lack. Yet unless the poetic sense within is atrophied, how can one miss all of the fine and sure pre-Raphaelitic detail work of which he was the master!

Here is a poet concerned about his native land, proud of it, perceiving and revelling in the peculiar charms of its physical aspects. It is his enduring thought; he will write little and that not so well without its inspiration. "The Ages" rises in its climax to the height of patriotic prophecy; in "Thanatopsis" he is mindful of "the continuous woods where rolls the Oregon," the "Forest Hymn" is a repercussion of his walks around old Greylock. "Catterskill Falls," "The Hunter of the Prairies," "The Indian Girl's

Lament," "Monument Mountain," "An Indian Story," "Autumn Woods," "A Scene on the Banks of the Hudson," have the same inspiration. Even in his "To a Waterfowl," which might seem to be without locality, are touches that would not suit any other soil. And of course when upon a purely national theme, as in "Seventy-Six," "Song of Marion's Men," "The Green Mountain Boys," he released his soul into fervors.

To a highly sophisticated age like ours, Bryant's meditative and moral poems seem sometimes trite, sometimes forced and sometimes too obvious. A few suffered a generation ago from too much repetition and are to recover hereafter or not at all, as the case may be. We are to remember the age and its fantasies as we may hope another period will be merciful to ours. It was a time when poetry was believed, in many quarters, to be a handmaid of religion and to serve best as a bearer of maxims of good conduct. Commendable verse must raise the minatory finger or point the path of duty. Few poems have been written to suit another taste than that contemporaneous; for one reason, because there is no mortal guessing what fancy the whims of the next century will pursue. But when we have with smiles and not too

much condescension admitted the outworn nature of some of Bryant's singing, the fact remains that he was a genuine artist. Poe cited as characteristic of his genius that stanza from "June" that is like a strain from a Missa Solemnis:

I know that I no more should see
The season's glorious show,
Nor would its brightness shine for me,
Nor its wild music flow;

* * *

But if around my place of sleep,
The friends I love should come to weep,
They might not haste to go.
Soft airs, and song, and light, and bloom
Should keep them lingering by my tomb.

But, after all, in its most familiar exercise his genius was pictorial; he was of the order of those that see, he was a painter using words for his colors; and it is in such native landscapes from his brush as "The Painted Cup" that his artistic soul had its truest expression, as:

But thou art of a gayer fancy. Well—
Let then the gentle Manitou of flowers,
Lingering amid the bloomy waste he loves,
Though all his swarthy worshippers are gone—
Slender and small, his rounded cheek all brown
And ruddy with the sunshine; let him come

On summer mornings, when the blossoms wake,
And part with little hands the spiky grass,
And touching, with his cherry lips, the edge
Of these bright beakers, drain the gathered dew.

The singers multiplied after Bryant's advent, some deserving a notice that this survey cannot give them and many surviving only in the attention of the bibliophile. I take from the slender little black volume of Edward Coate Pinkney's poems that of which Poe was so fond, "A Health":

I fill this cup to one made up
Of loveliness alone,
A woman, of her gentle sex
The seeming paragon;
To whom the better elements
And kindly stars have given
A form so fair, that, like the air,
'Tis less of earth than heaven.

Campbell commended General George Pope Morris, author of that well-worn favorite of another day, "Woodman, Spare that Tree," and doughty opponent of Cooper on many a fiercely fought literary field; but the laurels must have been for home consumption, or offered in a moment of amiable weakness. In the literary cliques of that day and the sun of a brief glory basked ambitious versifiers now obliterated from all the scrolls. Of others the names are embalmed in Poe's

critical writings and so saved from the common and merited fate.

> Whose fame, beyond their own abode,
> Extends—for miles along the Harlem road,

sang Holmes, contemptuous of this busy but largely futile contingent. Perhaps not so futile as he thought. Their output was not nearly so important as the bare facts of their existence and activities, for they showed that the literary interest was always widening and deepening. Perhaps they were like those other operations of nature in which only three seeds in a thousand take root. At least, a man must have developed a considerable liking and appreciation for verse before he will undertake the pains of making it. The literary pretensions and squabbles of the days of General Morris seem now silly or amusing, but out of it all were to emerge poets of unassailable quality.

A phase of early American poetry that has escaped general comment is that so many of the singers were affected by what they saw with the outer and the inner eye rather than by what they heard with the inner ear. They were of the order of painters rather than of the order of musicians. This must have resulted from two facts, that what they saw in

their environment was fresher and better than what we see now, and that music in America was of slight worth and less inspiration.

The greatness of Emerson as a philosopher and moral teacher has transcended his place as a poet; yet poet he was of surest warrant, in spite of a mystical cloudiness that barred him from the generality of people. It was too much to expect that the average busy man, however committed to culture, should stop to thresh out with diligent labor the wheat of such a poem as "Brahma." He might have been well enough repaid for the effort, but he would not make it.

A son of Boston at a time when Boston was easily the intellectual and literary capital of the nation, Emerson was born May 25, 1803, was graduated at Harvard, became a clergyman, gave up, because of a conscientious scruple, a pastorate in which he had been for three years successful, and was thereafter to a steadily increasing following a philosopher, guide and in his writings, a friend. Thomas Carlyle was the first person of note to recognize his greatness, and that at a time when his own countrymen were inclined to ignore his existence. In 1846 he brought out his first volume of poems, but thereafter was more and more engrossed in philosophical

and speculative prose, a selection from which fills five volumes.

Although the essential quality of his poetical work was a dreamy, agreeable occultism, he could on occasion be marvelously direct and simple, and marvelously effective, too. He had at such times a facility in phrase making that amounted to genius. Nothing better than his "embattled farmers" that "fired the shot heard round the world" could have been imagined for his immortal Concord song. His "Ode" for the Fourth of July, 1857, is almost as good. Probably it will always be difficult for the average reader to follow the involutions of so long and so profoundly introspective a poem as "Woodnotes," but there are lines in it that the thoughtful will cherish highly.

> For He that worketh high and wise,
> Nor pauses in his plan,
> Will take the sun out of the skies
> Ere freedom out of man.

If by chance a sceptic should be unfamiliar with the simple, unaffected integrity that characterized much of Emerson's poetry and was in his time fairly new in this country or another, let such a doubter consider well of the beautiful "Threnody" written upon the

death of Emerson's little son. Simplicity and sincerity—and that curious mastery over small but pregnant details that was to become still more conspicuous in another American.

The painted sled stands where it stood;
The kennel by the corded wood;
His gathered sticks to stanch the wall
Of the snow-tower, when the snow should fall;
The ominous hole he dug in the sand,
The childhood's castles built or planned;
His daily haunts I well discern,—
The poultry-yard, the shed, the barn,—
And every inch of garden ground
Paced by the blessed feet around,
From the roadside to the brook
Wherein he loved to look . . .
The brook into the stream runs on;
But the deep-eyed boy is gone.

It will not stand up well under a musical analysis, but there can be no doubt of its wealth of visual suggestion.

Still better in "The Snow Storm."

Come see the north wind's masonry.
Out of an unseen quarry evermore
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer
Carves his white bastions with projected roof
Round every windward stake, or tree, or door.
Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work
So fanciful, so savage, naught cares he
For number or proportion. Mockingly,
On coop or kennel he hangs Parian wreaths;
A swan-like form invests the hidden thorn;

Fills up the farmer's lane from wall to wall,
Maugre the farmer sighs; and, at the gate,
A tapering turret overtops the work;
And when his hours are numbered, and the world
Is all his own, retiring, as he were not,
Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art
To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone,
Built in an age, the mad wind's night-work,
The frolic architecture of the snow.

In a way, Whittier was to outdo the strong and good native note in this, but not the perfect and polished beauty of its thought and imagery.

Before he went roving into the enchanted forest of speculative thought, beauty was his religion; he sat there in her chancel with the rest of the brotherhood.

Still on the seeds of all He made
The rose of beauty burns;
Through times that wear and forms that fade,
Immortal Youth returns.

The ultimate spirit of the mysticism that puzzled or offended literalists in his own time has reasserted itself in much of the poetry of a later date; the mysticism—and the essential of his unusual phraseology. It is easy to discern his influence in many of the successful poets of the third decade of the twentieth century. Reincarnation is the test; to live again in other lyres and other singers' art

as well as their love. It is the flawless immortality. Names fade, books are junked, but mind upon mind goes on forever.

Somewhat akin to this great spirit was Jones Very, born at Salem, Massachusetts, in 1813, and educated at Harvard for the ministry. He wrote many sonnets on the Shakespearian model, meditative, religious, pictorial, introducing a slight variation in these fourteeners by making the last line an Alexandrine. There was nothing imitative about his note; nay, he was, in a way, the earliest exemplar of what long afterwards developed into an unmistakable hallmark of American poetry, which is the apt and powerful command of the epithet. His nature poems show that other strong American trait of intimate inside understanding of nature's moods and manifestations, for he, again, was not a traveler through the woods and fields, but a dweller in them.

THE WIND-FLOWER

Thou lookest up with meek confiding eye
Upon the clouded smile of April's face,
Unharmed though Winter stands uncertain by
Eyeing with jealous glance each opening grace.
Thou trustest wisely! In thy faith arrayed
More glorious thou than Israel's wisest king;
Such faith was his whom men to death betrayed
As thine who hearest the timid voice of Spring,

While other flowers still hide them from her call
Along the river's brink and meadow bare,
Thee will I seek beside the stony wall
And in thy trust with childlike heart would share,
O'erjoyed that in thy early leaves I find
A lesson taught by him who loved all human kind.

LABOR AND REST

Thou need'st not rest: the shining spheres are thine
That roll perpetual on their silent way,
And Thou dost breathe in me a voice divine,
That tells more sure of thine eternal sway;
Thine the first starting of the early leaf,
The gathering green, the changing autumn hue,
To Thee the world's long years are but as brief
As the fresh tints that Spring will soon renew.
Thou needest not man's little life of years,
Save that he gather wisdom from them all;
That in thy fear he lose all other fears
And in thy calling heed no other call.
Then shall he be thy child to know thy care,
And in thy glorious Self the eternal Sabbath share.

We have to do in this volume with the poets that have contributed most to the shaping of American verse, and so trip by many a shrine honored in its day, if crumbling now. Not quite so with Nathaniel Parker Willis. Some poets write too much; he wrote too little. One surmises from his work that he did not fathom his own gift; fathom it or respect it, I know not which. The declaimed "Parrhasius," despite some faults, has an absolute and extraordinary power; we feel that its

author might have stirred us much more if he had but tried. And, in his "Unseen Spirits," there is the same rather startling suggestion of an unachieved destiny, when he brings his five curt stanzas up with a round turn that leaves us with a tendency to gasp and ponder.

But we leave him aside with Simms the novelist and Charles Fenno Hoffman, who wrote "Monterey," noting no more than the suggestion that all of them are worth the careful student's heed. So are others. In the swift rise of an American literature women were taking an increasing part. The second edition of Griswold's "Female Poets of America" lists ninety-four that had in their own time won distinction—a significant fact in a new country.

Chapter Three

TWO NOTABLE PICTURE MAKERS

His own generation adulated Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: the next came to regard him at first lightly and then with disdain. This was inevitable and in accord with all human experience. We are not quite sure of the superiority of our own day unless we can emphasize the lowly nature of that which has just preceded us—an enlargement of the atomic and eternal alternations in college class strifes. The higher the pedestal upon which Yesterday placed its idol, the lower the pit into which it is now to be cast. One after another in all the lands they go down—belike to rise again. Tennyson, Rossetti, William Morris in England; Bryant, Whittier, Taylor, Longfellow in our country. Longfellow—one might think his workmanship might have saved him from the overpulling. Granted that for his more commonplace themes and his naïve manner we care nothing now, there is still that point of his workmanship. Granted that, as the superficial and the erotic now proclaim, he wrote without

what is called passion—still the exemplary workman! It is odd about this man. Other poets have outlived the errors of their youth. Almost all of them have in the beginning launched juvenilia that the later years have erased with a tolerant smile. The unlucky "Psalm of Life" was hung around Longfellow's neck and is still there. Useless to tell a Longfellow detractor that this prize banality was not really characteristic, that it was atoned by many pages of superb artistry. "The Psalm of Life" is ineradicable from minds that have not read nor heard of "Oft have I seen at some cathedral door."

Adversity has practical as well as sweet uses—for poets. Longfellow's good fortune was his ill; his life that began in a well-to-do household in Portland, February 27, 1807, was led too much in the placidity of cloisters and never touched the rough and tumble of actuality. A kind of recluse he was; and so, at this climax of a machine civilization, certain to be misunderstood and derided.

Some poets rise almost at once to the height of their powers and decline thence with the passing years, as the fire slowly dies within them. Tennyson and Swinburne are familiar examples. Each reached early the

top of his road and never stood again upon equal heights. Others reverse this process and, keeping young within, slowly ascend year upon year. None more notably than Longfellow, who began rather lamely, truth to say, and so improved and advanced that his last work was his best.

As to passion, it is true there is a sense in which he had little—or none. "Who cannot hate can love not." His addictions and repulsions were alike mild and well-disciplined. He hated slavery, but after the manner of a well-bred gentleman who, being a college professor, has a double reason for suppressing emotion. Similarly, when he dealt in amatory verse (which was seldom), though no one could call him cold, or not much colder than one might properly expect in view of his geography, his lovers make love after the manner of the intelligent, the orderly, of men conscious of the history and respectable tradition of New England. You are mildly interested in *John Alden* and wish him well, and mildly sorry for *Miles Standish* and hope his hurt will heal, but the whole pleasing little drama passes without the stirring of a pulse or the batting of an eye; unless, perchance for weariness. Even in "Evangeline," his masterpiece for sentiment, despite

its genuine and searching pathos there is hardly the remotest suggestion of the physical. It is perfectly well ordered love; papa and mama could be ever present and not be disturbed. No one may deny that the taste of a later day, fed daily upon the hot tabasco of the cinematograph, was wholly different and viewed with contempt the gentle and idyllic loves of *Gabriel* and *Evangeline*. In "The Spanish Student" he was moved a little; *Victorian* has a touch of the Spanish sun—at times—and so is something of a wonder. But professorial propriety never quite forgets itself. A later generation may fall with amazement, if at all, upon such lines as these:

> I believe
> That woman, in her deepest degradation,
> Holds something sacred, something undefiled,
> Some pledge and keepsake of her higher nature,
> And, like the diamond in the dark, retains
> Some quenchless gleam of the celestial light!

It was not with any such notion that later writers came to paint their tigresses and vampires.

Yet not all passion is of the flesh. It was but superficial to say that Longfellow had none. There is throughout his later works a

noble passion for beauty, for art and for art's great practitioners; and a sympathy that was genuine and passionate, if controlled, with those upon whom fall the deeper calamities of life. The reflective and the sensitive will always find a lofty passion in the "Divina Commedia" sonnets.

O star of morning and of liberty!
  O bringer of the light, whose splendor shines
  Above the darkness of the Apennines,
Forerunner of the day that is to be!
The voices of the city and the sea,
  The voices of the mountains and the pines,
  Repeat thy song, till the familiar lines
Are footpaths for the thought of Italy!
Thy fame is blown abroad from all the heights,
  Through all the nations, and a sound is heard,
    As of a mighty wind, and men devout,
Strangers of Rome, and the new proselytes,
  In their own language hear thy wondrous word,
    And many are amazed and many doubt.

The real trouble with Longfellow is not that his worth is less than his former fame but that the world persists in reading him ill-favoredly. To this day ten readers, even among the considering and the reasoning, know about "The Psalm of Life" and the "Hanging of the Crane," for one that has gathered the greatness of "Michael Angelo."

This was the culmination of a life of loyal

labor, the work in which he poured out the love and devotion he had felt for the masters of the art that all his life he felt was nearest to his own and nearest to his soul. It is, despite its dramatic form, a kind of elevated laudation of the great Italian painters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. *Michael Angelo, Fra Sebastino, Titian, Giorgio Vasari,* but above all, *Michael Angelo,* and his idealistic love, the immortal *Colonna.* How can we say that Longfellow had no passion? It is with passion always that he clothes her in these pages with the varied garment of his adulation, but the kind of passion that a pure-hearted worshipper might bring before the image of a saint. All the gentlest nobility of life seems expressed in this gracious figure, and all the noblest emotions of the human heart in *Angelo's* stainless love for her. For those that think grief is expressed in the manner of *Termagant,* there will never be anything significant in *Angelo's* lament for his lost idol when she dies; that passage is for those holding with Mrs. Browning that hopeless grief is passionless. Probably it is only minds of this order that will perceive beneath the restraint the superb eloquence of the last speech, the fare-

well of *Michael Angelo* and of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

> Life hath become to me
> An empty theatre,—its lights extinguished,
> The music silent, and the actors gone;
> And I alone sit musing on the scenes
> That once have been. I am so old that Death
> Oft plucks me by the cloak, to come with him;
> And some day, like this lamp, shall I fall down
> And my last spark of life will be extinguished.

A few months saw the fulfillment of this foreboding. "Michael Angelo" was almost his last poem.

No doubt he chose wisely when he cast all these final eulogies and reflections into the form dramatic, although "Michael Angelo" could never be acted. "The Spanish Student" could be and has been; "Michael Angelo" is a series of metrical conversations with a few dramatic scenes among them. But no one knows the real Longfellow that has not let its significance lay hold upon his thought.

There was another department of his art in which this man, despite all the detraction, achieved with unquestionable greatness. All careful students of the sonnet, that most difficult of the fixed forms of verse, know that Longfellow was one of its few masters. In the making of a just and perfect sonnet he

must be ranked with Rossetti, Keats and Mrs. Browning. His extraordinary facility in this respect was the logical outcome of his order of mind. He was eminently a colorist, not a melodist; and the sonnet belongs to the visual division of songs. No melodist ever made a Guittonian or Petrarchan sonnet of the first order, for the reason that his mind is running upon the melody under his hand, while sonnet-making demands concentrated attention upon the picture. See Swinburne else, who made many verses that sailed under the sonnet's facile flag. Often they were powerful invectives, eloquent tributes, excellent editorials; never was one a genuine sonnet. Tennyson was likewise bogged; so was Shelley. "Ozymandias" is not a sonnet; it is a fourteener and beautiful and good at that, but never to be considered in the sonnet class. But Longfellow had the true knack of it; he, the painter, adept in his word colors, was intent always upon pictorial values. No melodist would ever have committed the musical error of duplicating his *A* chords in the sestette of the first of the great sonnets of the "Divina Commedia."

So, as I enter here from day to *day*,
And leave my burden at this minster *gate*,
Kneeling in prayer, and not ashamed to *pray*,

The tumult of the time disconso*late*
To inarticulate murmurs dies *away*,
While the eternal ages watch and *wait*.

But he had the true touch of the pre-Raphaelite, without which no sonnet is ever a success.

How strange the sculptures that adorn these towers!
This crowd of statues, in whose folded sleeves
Birds build their nests; while canopied with leaves—

and again

But fiends and dragons on the gargoyled eaves
Watch the dead Christ between the living thieves,
And underneath the traitor Judas lowers.

If Longfellow had been judged by these works instead of his sentimental and hearthstone poetry, how different today would have been his monument!

There remains to be spoken of his translations and his ambitious and notable attempts to vary the everlasting persistence of one English measure by writing verse in what is called "dactyllic hexameters." If he had been a better musician he would never have made this venture. The structure of the language does not admit of the use of classical prosody. For one illustration, and enough, the measure of the Iliad and the Æneid re-

quires a spondee at the end of each line, and there is no such thing in our tongue. Moreover, the feet (time-bars) that Longfellow regarded as dactyls can be read also as amphibracs. He made this scansion of a typical line:

Bent like a|laboring|oar that|toils in the|surf of the|ocean.

But the line by all the accepted standards of English verse, can as justly be scanned thus:

Bent like|a labor|ing oar that|toils in|the surf of|the ocean.

Whereupon all the dactyls have vanished and we have left a line beginning with what is called a trochee and made up thereafter of amphibracs. Every line in "Evangeline" can be treated in the same way with the same results. And as for the spondee, do but consider the absurdity of deeming "ocean" to be of that order! The genius of the language ordinarily forbids two accented syllables to fall in juxtaposition. "Dactyls call'st thou them? God help thee, silly one!" wrote an English satirist about a similar experiment in his own country.

The real structure of "Evangeline" is $\frac{2}{4}$ time; that is, a time-bar of the equivalent of

two quarter notes, and the moment this is perceived all scansion difficulties disappear.

But aside from these considerations, which may be deemed more or less technical though fundamental, "Evangeline" is good poetry and deserved its extraordinary vogue. It is a dignified and feeling attempt to tell a moving story, and for the generality of readers will usually succeed. There is no doubt the man had with his other gifts an excellent facility in narrative. The "Tales of a Wayside Inn" are well conceived, well sustained, well told. If they do not stir the pulses with wild adventure or gratify prurient tastes, they are interesting and satisfying, and the more honorable to his workmanship that they display so much variety of measure, subject and style. As to the "Hiawatha," once deemed immortal, burlesque and parody have in these years almost done for that curious and not over-inspiring excursion, but another generation may reverse the verdict of our court below.

Of his translations, his Dante will always have the respectful attention of students for its care and sympathetic deliberation. It cannot be called an adequate version of the colossal original. More fire, more terror, more dynamics of every kind were required than

the placid professor at Harvard could bring to the task.

The close of this period of American literature was called by its unsuspecting contemporaries "the Twilight of the Gods." Another generation invaded the Valhalla and scornfully entreated many a deity. Among them, John Greenleaf Whittier.

"Whittier must not be parodied," said Bayard Taylor, irreverent toward others. It was at one time the common feeling. He had been so conspicuously and courageously an Abolitionist that the period following the close of the Civil War, when his principles came triumphant from that hot testing, looked upon him with respect and veneration that were personal, not critical. But he was more than a champion of human liberty; he was distinctively an American poet with a certain though narrowly restricted method, native, not acquired, and never labored to make it grow. His was a plain, seemly, wimpled muse, demure, modest, perfect of faith, utterly convinced, sometimes convincing; a maiden that might have belonged to his own peculiar sect, a model Quaker, silent now, and when the spirit moved testifying for the Lord with a magnificent sincerity if

with no scholastic polish of utterance. If she sang simply she sang truly.

One of the artistic disadvantages of any reforming cause is that the occasion passes and with it the chance to estimate rightly the merit of the work it called forth. No one now can realize the flaming zeal of the Abolitionist any more than one can enter upon the feelings of Saint Lawrence on the gridiron. The champions of freedom in that struggle were stirred mightily by poems of Whittier that necessarily leave us not only cold but wondering. Yet sometimes, even now, fire catches. I am unable to see, for my own part, why "Ichabod" is not the greatest poetic invective in the language. Swinburne has more venom and burns with a more savage hatred than the Quaker could feel for anybody, but what else is there for comparison? "The New Timon and the Poets" reads like a Mother Goose rhyme; the frigid rhetoric of Churchill merely wearies; the pet hates of Pope and Dryden are for man's amusement. But no one can read "Ichabod" without feeling that here is a great soul greatly moved upon a great occasion.

> So fallen! so lost! the light withdrawn
> Which once he wore!

The glory from his gray hairs gone
Forever more!

Revile him not,—the Tempter hath
A snare for all;
And pitying tears, not scorn and wrath,
Befit his fall!

O, dumb be passion's stormy rage,
When he that might
Have lighted up and led his age,
Falls back in night!

Scorn! would the angels laugh to mark
A bright soul driven
Fiend-goaded, down the endless dark,
From hope and heaven!

This recluse, living sequestered on his farm at Amesbury, saw some things better than statesmen and commentators nearer the battle line.

When faith is lost, when honor dies,
The man is dead!

Few really believed at that time that Daniel Webster by his surrender to the slave owners had signed his death warrant, but the next year saw the Quaker's prophecy come true.

Besides his great cause, Whittier touched the tender stops of various quills, even of the romantic, though perhaps he knew better. An austere Quaker bachelor, what would you ex-

pect when he approached an amatory subject? "Maud Muller" is answer enough. If Longfellow's muse on these topics was decorous, Whittier's was shrinking. Yet sex is not the only subject a poet can sing upon. In an erotic age, such as followed the Restoration, men are apt to think so until there appear enough John Wilmots and other naked hircines to produce a reaction toward health. Yet all the time there is no lack of other themes to which pertain feelings as true as those of sex and as legitimately to be transferred. When employed upon an aspect of nature in his own country, Whittier had a power of delineation both accurate and moving. It was unfortunate for his renown that he wrote about things that, being so peculiarly native, could never be understood in England, where our literary judgments were once exclusively manufactured for us. No Englishman could ever understand

From barn and spire stood westerly the patient weathercocks;
But even the birches on the hills were motionless as rocks.
No sound was in the woodlands, save the squirrels dropping shell,
And the yellow leaves among the boughs, low rustling as they fell,

as a picture of autumn, because autumn to him signifies cold rains and lowering skies and shivering firesides. But to an American, aware of the glories of Indian summer, the picture is perfect. Similarly, "Snow Bound," which is truly a great American poem, was never read in England and could not be. It was like something in a strange tongue.

> A night made hoary with the swarm,
> And whirl-dance of the blinding storm,
> As zig-zag wavering to and fro
> Crossed and recrossed the wingéd snow:
> And ere the early bedtime came
> The white drift piled the window frame,
> And through the glass the clothes-line posts
> Looked in like tall and sheeted ghosts.

Think of a dweller in a west-end flat that never saw snow, except in pictures and a few smutty flakes, slave of laundries and motor 'buses, struggling with the details of this limning! Yet for its own locale, as respectable as any other, it was and is absolute and vital picture making, with its

> The old familiar sights of ours
> Took marvelous shapes: strange domes and towers
> Rose up where sty or corn-crib stood,
> Or garden-wall or belt of wood;
> A smooth white mound the brush-pile showed,
> A fenceless drift what once was road;

The bridle-post an old man sat
With loose-flung coat and high cocked hat;
The well-curb had a Chinese roof ——

and so on. He is after the potent items with the indefatigable patience of a Memling; he will have them all in if they help to touch his painting to reality. Good work!

Chapter Four

POE, HOLMES, LOWELL, CHIVERS

BUT the towering genius of all this period in the American story and perhaps of all others was Poe, with whom the law of ebb and flow, temporarily dimming Longfellow and Whittier, has worked contrariwise. In his own day, he all but starved, and for long after was by the right-minded mentioned with a shudder, if at all. Forty years he had been in his grave before his greatness began to be discerned by his countrymen. The main reason was that they disapproved of his life and, with the acute racial logic, held that nothing good could come from a person of bad habits. The French, who were long ago able to differentiate between product and producer, hailed him at once as the marvel he really was, and his poems and stories were familiar in France when they were little esteemed in his own country.

He was not only great in himself, but the stimulus of greatness in others. Charles Baudelaire was directly inspired by him. Swinburne was his artistic successor and step-son,

and anyone that cares to see how deeply he affected Robert Louis Stevenson has only to read, or re-read, the section of "The Master of Ballantrae" that is entitled "Mr. Mackellar's Journey with the Master."

The great access of honor that has come to Poe has made his persistent misadventures familiar to all; how he was born of strolling actors; how he was adopted by a charitable man that afterward cast him adrift; how he drank and quarreled and sorrowed and lived in garrets and wrote divine poetry and perished miserably at last when he should have been in the fullest tide of his glory. What is not so well known is the nature and substance of his inspiration and the secret of his appeal.

As truly as Longfellow was all for the things seen, or to be seen, Poe was all for the things to be heard. Charles W. Kent and the late James Huneker drew competent analogies between his spirit and that of Chopin, and no likening could have been apter. Under different conditions he would have been a composer for the world to marvel and weep over; there was never a man with a surer inborn sense of melody. Consciously or unconsciously, he carried the melodic development of our poetry far beyond any pred-

ecessor. Its scientific formulation is due to him, or to the research he inspired. He opened the closed door of verbal melodic mystery and the rest trooped in. The Brownings might jeer at the innovator and Emerson turn upon him a wintry dispraise. He had found the eternal secret, he had laid hand upon the magic wand, he knew how to make the words sing in men's ears, and, too late, the world made for him the place it reserves for daring and successful discoverers.

It may be doubted if there is in Poe a single visible object; he gives us the feeling of many things, but otherwise than by causing us to see them. We love "Annabel Lee" but we never saw her; and the reason we love her is the reason we love the invisible forms that haunt the music of Chopin. They are all melodic creations together. "Annabel Lee" is marvelous music, with a two-fold spell upon the inner ear, irresistible witchery in its rhythms and singular amplitude in its sound values. It is like the Third Etude. Notice:

It was many and many a year ago in a kingdom by
the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know by
the name of Annabel Lee.

Liquid *l* and *m* sounds swinging upon the exultant surge of a delectable rhythm beat,

infallibly varied. Even in "The Valley of Unrest," where, if ever, he might be thought to attempt something in the descriptive way, there is nothing to see but much to hear.

> Ah, by no wind are stirred those trees
> That palpitate like the chill seas
> Around the misty Hebrides!
> Ah, by no wind those clouds are driven
> That rustle through the unquiet heaven
> Uneasily, from morn to even,
> Over the violets there that lie
> In myriad types of the human eye—
> Over the lilies there that wave
> And weep above a nameless grave!
> They wave:—from out their fragrant tops
> Eternal dews come down in drops.
> They weep:—from off their delicate stems
> Perennial tears descend in gems.

The literalists turned from Poe in despair; and to this day, whatever they may pretend, do not really rise to him. It is the unfortunate confusion in a part of the public mind between hymnology and poetry; the belief so well rooted in the Anglo-Saxon that the true purpose of poetry is to inculcate morals. Unless somewhere is an adjuration to correct behavior the poem fails; it contains no "thought." One of the facts that distinguish Poe is that he was in practise an early and obstinate cavalier against any such conception of art; he seems the first poet in

our list to be always and deliberately the artist. His mysticism repelled many and may still work to limit his audience; but it is first of all to be remembered about Poe that he was concerned with feelings and not with the will, and next that he set out to transfer with symbols of sound the feeling that had seized him—symbols of sound, not with symbols of vision.

This is a distinction too little considered. To transfer a feeling being the sole purpose of art and art's only tolerable definition, the measure of the transference is the measure of a poem's success. There is no other criterion, as there is for the poet no other aim. Poe himself says that he deliberately sat down to compose a poem that would express (transfer) the feelings of sadness that pertain to great and refined beauty, and every aspect of "The Raven" was designed to further that end; every aspect—form, stanza, refrain, succession of images, development and, above all, the music. Poets of Poe's order compose to an air and only so. The result was something that has moved millions of readers to the mood the author designed; to whom, that is to say, the feelings that possessed him have been perfectly transferred. Therefore it is one of the most successful poems ever writ-

ten. Considered as a narrative it is only a suggestive outline; as a commentary on life it is negligible. As a potential transmitter of an eternal feeling it is hardly to be matched. And yet withal it is artifice, say the sober-browed critics. No doubt; but the difference in Poe's case is that he admitted what is customarily concealed.

For obvious reasons, Poe chose the midnight as the time of his little drama, a lonely studio as the place and a bereaved lover as the actor. These assured the appropriate background and accessories for the attempted transference. He made the midnight dreary, he brought in a supernatural visitor, he continually suggested the memory of the lost love, he cunningly adjusted the supernatural to this memory to sharpen it. But all these might have existed in the work and still the effect have been less were it not for the powerful spell that lies in the music.

This is achieved, basically, by the rhythmic beat, the splendid skill of the rhyming, the adroit use of so many rhymes in "ore," and then by the faultless perception of the musical value of words, a gift in which Poe to this day is unexcelled.

> And the silken sad uncertain
> Rustling of each purple curtain—

The *s* sound is the base note of a true progression of chords in "silken sad uncertain," when the base note of the chord changes to *u*, in "rustling of each purple curtain." Any musician could in effect reproduce on a piano these chords or their analogues. Indeed, if Merkel's vowel scale were followed up and developed it might be possible to reproduce them literally.

It is evident that we have here a prodigy, a being over-mastered with the power of his own musical surge, borne along by the musician's irresistible necessity to create, and having no other vehicle or outlet than the music of words in which he perceived melodies not before known. And that seems to me a just estimate of Edgar Allen Poe and the reason for his immortality in fame. The melodic phase of English poetry had been developing and growing as the language solidified and facility increased. He carried it beyond all precedent.

"The Bells," the poem in which he probably reached the boundary of his powers in these respects, has been, and still is, criticized by those that look upon it from what are called the standards. These critics can hardly have discerned that it is a piece of music

to be performed by a reader instead of a singer. The poet is trying to transfer successively the feelings of delight, happiness, terror and sorrow by providing the reader with materials for the recitative in different keys. It is an elocutionist's task, primarily, and one to tax to the limit the best powers of the best. The critics fall foul of the repetition of the word "bells."

> Of the bells, bells, bells,
> Of the bells, bells, bells, bells—
> To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells,

offends their taste. They cannot well perceive that in each stanza this repetition is designed to take on a different key, and where the reading is inaudible the reader's inner ear and inner voice are supposed to do the offices that physical ear and physical voice ordinarily perform—an innovation, and perhaps an extravagance, but surely a proof that this was an artist.

The Poe story is incomplete without a mention of Chivers, the redoubtable, the inscrutable, over whom at a later date Swinburne was to shout and Andrew Lang marvel.

Dr. Thomas Holley Chivers, of Georgia, author of "Facets of Diamonds" and of

"Eonchs[1] of Ruby"; also of "Nacoochie, the Beautiful Star," and other works.

Stedman whistles him off with an uncomplimentary word or two; not an anthology that I have been able to consult has so much as a line from his assiduous and amazing muse; diligent search for years in highways and by-ways has not unearthed additional copies of his works; and yet he was the literary problem insoluble in his own day, and curiously mysterious in ours. From time to time his strange, baffling figure moves across the back drop of American letters, and then disappears. Poe's professed friend while Poe lived, virulently accusing Poe of rankest plagiarism when Poe was dead, his actual character was as undefined as his exotic inspiration. When he had been dust fifty years, came a singular revival of interest in his allegations of pilfering, and they still continue spasmodically to intrigue many minds, mostly immature.

[1] More than one investigator has puzzled over this word, which does not occur in our language nor in any other of modern knowledge except possibly the Choctaw. A suggestion that seems at least plausible is that the word Chivers intended was Conchs and that a typographical error contains the real answer to the mystery.

Ten volumes of his verse are known to be extant, but no more. The Library of Congress keeps four (under lock and key), Brown University, the British Museum, and Harvard have others. There is scarcely a greater curio in literature; partly because of the assault upon the memory of Poe, but more because of the lush exuberance of the Chivers song, the like of which is not to be found in other archives. Southern oratory had long commanded wondering attention for its luxuriant flowerage of adornment. Chivers could make the most ornate southern eloquence seem almost flat. A few lines from his "Apollo" will indicate his unusual processes.

Like some deep, impetuous river from the fountains everlasting,
Down the serpentine soft valley of the vistas of all Time,
Over cataracts of adamant uplifted into mountains,
Soared his soul to God in thunder on the winds of thought sublime.
With the rising golden glory of the sun in ministrations,
Making oceans metropolitan of splendor for the dawn—
Piling pyramid on pyramid of music for the nations—
Sings the Angel who sits shining everlasting in the sun,
For the stars, which are the echoes of the shining of the sun.

"The Vigil in Aiden," which in some ways suggests "The Raven," begins thus:

In the Rosy Bowers of Aiden,
With her ruby-lips love-laden,
Dwelt the mild, the modest Maiden
Whom Politian called Lenore.
As the churches, with their whiteness,
Clothe the earth, with her uprightness
Clothed she now his soul with brightness
Breathing out her heart's love-lore.

"Rosalie Lee" from which he said Poe pilfered "Annabel Lee" contains this stanza:

Many mellow Cydonian Suckets,
Sweet apples, anthosmial, divine,
From the Ruby-rimmed Beryline buckets,
Star-gemmed, lily-shaped, hyaline—
Like that sweet golden goblet found growing
On the wild emerald Cucumber-tree—
Rich, brilliant, like Chrysopraz blowing—
I then brought to my Rosalie Lee—
To my lamb-like Rosalie Lee—
To my Dove-like Rosalie Lee—
To my beautiful, dutiful Rosalie Lee.

Genius or fakir, and no one can be too sure as to which he was, there can be no doubt of the native individuality of his product.

It would not be easy to find in the history of literature another instance like that of Oliver Wendell Holmes, a noted physician, noted surgeon, great lecturer, great writer on subjects connected with his profession,

leading in that profession an active and honored career, great essayist, wit and philosopher, and throughout a genuine and successful poet.

Poetry was not with him a diversion from regular pursuits; it was the outpourings of a soul touched with the everlasting fire. "The Chambered Nautilus" is safely anchored now in the harbor of the world's esteem. Deservedly—no one can read it attentively without feeling the beauty of its polished perfection. In the last stanza he opened the diapason with his magnificent

> Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul!

The spell of his prose, his whimsical, genial, human-touch prose, eclipsed to a great extent his due place as a poet. The world would not allow of so much versatility, particularly in an age of specialization. If a man is a humorist he cannot, in the common opinion, be also a great, grave, and tender poet. But even the sceptical world had to yield something to the ringing cadences of "Old Ironsides," and all thoughtful souls acknowledged the singular and searching beauty of "Under the Violets."

The Republic was finding itself in poetry as in policy; the colonial mind, fatal to pro-

duction, was slowly passing. American notes that had been struck by Bryant and Drake grew and strengthened. It is trite to say that only a Yankee could have produced such a poem as the "One Hoss Shay" and that from its first line to its last it was steeped in Americanism. But Holmes, though a true and admirable poet and artist, was not implicitly a man of letters as was Longfellow and as was James Russell Lowell.

National emotions gave birth to the first American poetry at the great time of the Revolution; the national emotions that seethed for thirty years over the issue of slavery brought forth many noble, if occasional, poems and gave his first eminence to Lowell.

It is rather astonishing that an intellectual, born and bred in conditions the most favorable for aloofness, not to say snobbery, he should have known so intimately and so faultlessly not only the dialect but the inmost psychology of the unlettered New Englander of his time. After all, there are intellectual as well as spiritual values about life in a democracy without caste. Lowell not only knew well his New Englander, but he knew how to make him act and discourse to compel the world's attention. The sheer artistry of

the "Biglow Papers" carried them even into hostile England, where they were quoted in the House of Commons. So strange in the British ear, the subjects they treated of so alien to British knowledge and prejudices; and yet they conquered. In this country, the effect was electric. Six months after the appearance of

> But John P
> Robinson he
> Sez he wunt vote fer Guvener B,

the whole North was repeating and chuckling over the wondrous sarcasm of the verses to which these lines were the refrain. In America, ridicule is undoubtedly the most powerful of all weapons. Lowell did more with his scalpel-like wit to take the mask from slavery than a hundred serious appeals could have done.

He became therefore the first of American publicists and, in his own way, greatest. The consummate skill of the "Biglow Papers" as propaganda has never been equaled and is not likely soon to be. It was the product of intense feeling perfectly controlled upon one sure aim in a great cause, and that combination, with a master hand to direct it, is not often to be met with.

He could be gravely impassioned and eloquent when he chose. "The Present Crisis" is a tonal and inspirational masterwork. Issues and passions that gave it birth have passed, but to this day we read it with quickened pulses. The passage most often quoted—

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne—

is not the only high flight in this remarkable and almost Olympian pæan.

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's New Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand and the sheep upon the right,
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light.

He knew what he was about; with rare judgment he took a stanzaic form that exactly suited his purposes, for it fell naturally into a chant, grave at once and lilting, simple and strong; so that the man in the street could get it and repeat it and hum it on his way to work, and still was there about it nothing tawdry nor light of waist. Two rhymes followed by three; anybody could get that. The

choice of meter was equally inspired; what is called the trochaic (only there is no such thing in our speech) conveying at once a certain impression of gravity and allowing a certain opportunity for effective pauses and phrasing.

He was a prolific singer in many keys on many and diverse themes. Unevenly; there is no doubt that sometimes he was dull and sometimes he was writing from the wrong kind of obligation. I mean he wrote not because he had something he was burning to say, but because he felt that writing was expected of him. "The Vision of Sir Launfal," his excursion into the Arthurian kingdom, still forced, I believe, upon unwilling students in our high schools, was hardly a happy experiment and can hardly be thought a happy selection to introduce his genius. There is always something incongruous and unlucky about an American poem on an English theme. Yet "Sir Launfal" begins with a noble prelude:

Over his keys the musing organist,
  Beginning doubtfully and far away,
First lets his fingers wander as they list,
  And builds a bridge from Dreamland for his lay;
Then, as the touch of his loved instrument
  Gives hope and fervor, nearer draws his theme,

First guessed by faint auroral flushes sent
Along the wavering vista of his dream.

The much quoted and perhaps overquoted apostrophe to June is in the Launfal introduction. Truth compels one to say that the prelude and the introduction surpass anything in the poem itself.

The "Harvard Commemoration Ode," written to honor the graduates of Harvard fallen in the Civil War, a poem of serious and highly conceived art, was his greatest work. If it has a touch of formalism at the beginning of more than one stanza, it warms always with genuine feeling and shows the fire as fire is shown through alabaster, the more beautiful for the medium it passes through. There was nothing cold about the ending of it:

O Beautiful! My Country! ours once more!
Smoothing thy gold of war-dishevelled hair
O'er such sweet brows as never other wore,
And letting thy set lips,
Freed from wrath's pale eclipse,
The rosy edges of their smile lay bare,
What words divine of lover or of poet
Could tell our love and make thee know it,
Among the nations bright beyond compare?
What were our lives without thee?
What all our lives to save thee?
We reck not what we gave thee;
We will not dare to doubt thee,
But ask whatever else, and we will dare!

He never reached a greater height. Then he went to England, and died there—artistically, not physically. After that the fire was out, the house cold. But not until he had enriched American literature with great things.

Chronologically, Walt Whitman comes next, and with this honored name we reach a question still debated and hotly burning and therefore to be approached with circumspection. Shall we include the beautiful things he created, or the bulk of them, within our definition of poetry? There is no question anywhere that he had the soul of a poet, and a great poet at that,—and then arises the doubt. It is wonderful, it is beautiful, it is mostly true, it is often satisfying, it is mellow of sound; but is it really poetry? That depends upon what we mean by poetry, and since every one is free to make and apply one's own definition, there is no oracular answer to that question. It is wonderful, beautiful, satisfying, and poetry, if you like to call it by that name. Some will; and some will hold that its true definition is rhapsodical prose; the greatest rhapsodical prose ever written, but still rhapsodical prose.

Let that be as it may, and it can be in-

terminably debated, there is no question about the poetry of "Captain, My Captain."

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done.
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won.
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

As to the others, a simple test may help. Take a few lines from his "Heroes":

We closed with him, the yards entangled, the cannon touched,
My captain lashed fast with his own hands.
We had received some eighteen-pound shots under the water,
On our lower gun-deck two large pieces had burst at the first fire, killing all around and blowing up overhead.

As it stands, this is regarded by what Swinburne called the Whitmaniacs as poetry. Suppose the same persons were to encounter it for the first time set like this:

"We closed with him, the yards entangled, the cannon touched. My captain lashed fast with his own hands. We had received some eighteen-pound shots under the water. On

our lower gun-deck two large pieces had burst at the first fire, killing all around and blowing up overhead."

Not a soul of them would now imagine it to be poetry.

If the same test should be applied to the rest of the characteristic writings of Whitman it would reveal the same results. No human being would ever call the writing poetry; many would hold it to be extraordinary prose, vibrant with feeling, power, beauty or otherwise; no one would call it poetry. It appears therefore that to deem this poetry we must have in the printer and helplessly depend upon his skill in placing the capitals and breaking up the lines, and does that process square with anybody's definition of poetry?

Whitman had many noble inspirations, and others not so noble or not noble at all; but his name is surrounded with an aureole of respect for his human sympathies and fervent democracy, and many that have thought they were admiring his works were in fact admiring his faith, which is a different thing.

Chapter Five

SINGERS OF THE CIVIL WAR PERIOD

AMERICANS being apparently the only people in the world that in all matters of art, literature or culture foster a chronic belief in their own lowly state, many American poets, as many American musicians and painters, have suffered from this national habit; conspicuously two of brilliant mind and genuine achievement, George Henry Boker and Bayard Taylor.

Boker, a native of Philadelphia, born in 1823, was graduated at Princeton and began almost at once the literary activities that ceased only with his death. One distinction that he conquered early was as the first American to write metrical drama of really the first order. When he was only twenty-six, his play "Calaynos" won a success in London, and his "Francesca da Rimini," with an enduring place as a classic, is still played. It merits all the favor it has received, and even more. Others have made plays of the tragic, moving story of Paolo and Francesca, none with the remarkable combination of dramatic

power and poetic insight to be noted in Boker.

He wrote other dramas, notably "Anne Boleyn," almost as good. Two qualities of greatness showed in these. He marshaled his events to dramatic but natural climaxes; he wrote with power, ease, clearness and restraint. In all his plays are to be found few inversions and none that offends. Scarcely another writer of blank verse in modern times has equaled him in this respect. He knew his trade so well that while the language is always imaginative and always rhythmic, nothing seems forced or done to avoid a difficulty. As for his dramatic powers, the last scene in "Francesca" is beyond common praise for its swift intensity. Another walking on such heights would have overdone or come lamely off or found refuge in fustian. He had also the Gallic gift of gripping the interest with the first line and steadily developing it until at the last the spectator seems lifted out of himself and forgetful that he is seeing no more than play-acting.

Besides his plays Boker deserves a place in our national hall of fame as one of the best of sonnet makers. It was a form that all his life powerfully attracted him; he was a true son of Guitto. Seventy-nine sonnets are

printed in his collected works, all true to form; he would not dally with fourteeners. It would be hard to summon another such group of equal merit from one pen; the same almost singular ease of singing is manifest in all. One may sometimes fail to go along with him, but in all the seventy-nine, no awkward phrase, no ill-chosen epithet, no other foot-slip. Only those that know the intorted difficulties of true sonnet making can appreciate what this means.

He was a sturdy patriot, too, and a stout-hearted democrat. His sonnet excoriation of Louis Napoleon has not the vitriol Swinburne poured upon the same unworthy head, but the judicious will think it more effective if more restrained. At a time when his country was involved in a serious controversy with Great Britain, he wrote two sonnets "To America" and this is the second of them:

What though the cities blaze, the ports be sealed,
  The fields untilled, the hands of labor still,
  Ay, every arm of commerce and of skill
Palsied and broken; shall we therefore yield—
Break up the sword, put by the dintless shield?
  Have we no home upon the wooded hill,
  That mocks a siege? No patriot ranks to drill?
No nobler labor in the battle-field?
Or grant us beaten. While we gather might,
  Is there no comfort in the solemn wood?

No cataracts whose angry roar shall smite
Our hearts with courage? No eternal brood
Of thoughts begotten by the eagle's flight?
No God to strengthen us in solitude?

He sang in many measures, on stirring themes and simple, and never sang anything badly. Of all poets it is to be said that a varying percentage of their product is of the nature of junk; the singer is yet to appear that sings always at the top of his powers. The dross runs from ninety-eight per cent. in Southey to perhaps ten per cent. in Poe. Boker will be found to have but little more. He wrote many things we do not greatly care for, but few that were not worthy of his genius.

His memory has suffered wrong at the hands of another generation so largely alien in its thinkings and tendencies, but at the worst has fared better than poor Taylor's, with whose deservings fate may be said to have dealt not alone unfairly but savagely. The centenary of Boker was observed in some fashion in the city of his birth. The centenary of Bayard Taylor, two years later, passed without a sign of public remembrance. And yet he was in truth a literary artist and versatile producer of whom any country might be proud.

Some men are eclipsed by an early success they are never able to repeat; some achieve neglect by doing many things well; and some have it thrust upon them by a public that associates them with one line of endeavor and refuses to accept them in any other. In stage history, the case of Frank Mayo and "Davy Crockett" is proverbial. Taylor's failure to attain the rank he deserved was of twofold origin. His interests and activities were too diffuse, and a great translation fixed in the public mind the notion that as he could translate so well he could do nothing else. Yet his gifts were as excellent as they were varied. He was a brilliant lecturer, a great journalist, a keen, sympathetic, discerning critic, a fair novelist, the best parodist that has appeared in this language, and a genuine poet.

The translation that won him praise and still, by its very success, worked him harm, was of Goethe's "Faust" and constituted a triumph of his own skill and scope. He not only succeeded in rendering faithfully all of the many meters of the original, but he reproduced its spirit and beauty. To do this he was peculiarly fitted by both inclining and endowment. All his life he had a pro-

found admiration for German literature and wrote of it one of the best histories extant; and he was by nature of the melodic order, he had this knack of making words sing. Not like Poe; no one is like Poe. But sing, in his own quieter way.

Everything else he attempted he did well, but one thing he could not do. He could not sustain a long narrative poem. "The Picture of St. John" is usually cited, if he is remembered at all, as his most striking work. It seems to me his worst. I do not believe anybody reads it now; or can read it. Nor yet "Lars, a Pastoral of Norway," which is almost as tedious. The man's genius was essentially lyric and he seemed not perfectly aware of the fact; an error that has appeared in other poets. But in his own lyric choir-loft he sang with ease and certainty a long succession of exquisite melodies. A short story in verse he could manage with power; I do not know that we have anything better of that kind than his "Temptation of Hassan Ben Khaled," while of Balzac's immortal soldier and the leopard he made a metrical version as good as the original. But again I come back to his lyric offerings and declare that about some of them was a charm of music

all his own and illimitably pleasing. Take but the tune of this "Pæan to the Dawn":

The dusky sky fades into blue,
And bluer waters bind us;
The stars are glimmering faint and few,
The night is left behind us!
Turn not where sinks the sullen dark
Before the signs of warning,
But crowd the canvas on our bark
And sail to meet the morning.
Rejoice! Rejoice! the hues that fill
The orient, flush and lighten;
While o'er the blue Ionian hill
The Dawn begins to brighten!

The excellent ballad, "The Song of the Camp," was his most popular poem.

Voice after voice caught up the song,
Until its tender passion
Rose like an anthem, rich and strong,—
Their battle-eve confession.

Dear girl, her name he dared not speak,
But, as the song grew louder,
Something upon the soldier's cheek
Washed off the stains of powder.

The last stanza contains the line likely to be quoted by millions that never heard of its author.

Sleep, soldiers! still in honored rest
Your truth and valor wearing:
The bravest are the tenderest,—
The loving are the daring.

Sentiment and execution are faultless, but as pure art, "Hylas" and "Harpocrates" rank higher.

What each reveals the shadow throws
Of something unrevealed behind;
The Secret's lips forever close
To mock the secret undivined;
Thence late I came, from weary dreams,
The son of Isis to implore,
Whose temple-front of granite gleams
Across the Desert's yellow floor.

Lo, where the sand insatiate, drinks
The steady splendor of the air,
Crouched on her heavy paws, the Sphinx
Looks forth with old, unwearied stare!
Behind her, on the burning wall,
The long processions flash and glow;
The pillared shadows of the hall
Sleep with their lotus-crowns below.

It is inconceivable how such a poem as "Hylas" escaped general attention and applause. In it Taylor may be said to have solved the difficult problem of English blank verse. A prosody without quantity is no facile vehicle for unrhymed singing; to repeat a trite comment, the blankness is usually there but the verse is a different matter. Taylor adopted in "Hylas" what are called "feminine" endings for his lines, taking the hint, may be, from Shakespeare's increasing practise in his later years. The scholiasts

would say that he made the last foot an amphibrac instead of an iambus. What he did musically was to make the last time-bar in each line consist of a quarter note and an eighth note instead of a quarter note and a rest, as is the usual custom.

Storm-wearied Argo slept upon the water.
No cloud was seen; on blue and craggy Ida
The hot noon lay, and on the plain's enamel;
Cool, in his bed, alone, the swift Scamander.
"Why should I haste?" said young and rosy Hylas.

and so on. With this treatment throughout he avoided the prose pit-falls that usually beset the versifier and lo! the stiff old vehicle becomes flexile under his hand. Flexile and musical, for now he can vary his time-bars with note and rest and make the lines echo with agreeable sound.

He adorned it, too, with rich fancy and a kind of youthful warmth of beauty lovely to contemplate.

Again the murmur, "Hylas!"
And with the sound a cold, smooth arm around him
Slid like a wave, and down the clear, green darkness
Glimmered on either side a shining bosom,—
Glimmered, uprising slow; and ever closer
Wound the cold arms, till, climbing to his shoulders,
Their cheeks lay nestled, while the purple tangles
Their loose hair made, in silken mesh enwound him.

He was the first great American traveler, the first American cosmopolite. The wanderlust was in his blood; when he was still a boy, or hardly more than that, he ventured abroad alone and for two years roamed up and down Europe, feasting his eyes, satisfying his soul, starving his body. In him subsisted a devotion to the chilly North and a passionate yearning for baking deserts. He went to the Near East and tramped with native tribes until in complexion, speech and manner he was taken for a Bedouin. Some of the best of his singing and the most popular of his lectures resulted from these stretched-out journeyings. "Poems of the Orient," the volume of songs was called. It showed the indomitable music of his soul and his unusual command over stubborn meters. The "Envoi" is as characteristic as anything else in the book.

Unto the Desert and the Desert steed
  Farewell! The journey is completed now:
Struck are the tents of Ishmael's wandering breed,
  And I unwind the turban from my brow.

The sun has ceased to shine; the palms that bent,
  Inebriate with light, have disappeared;
And naught is left me of the Orient
  But the tanned bosom and the unshorn beard.

Yet from that life my blood a glow retains,
As the red sunshine in the ruby glows;
These songs are echoes of its fiercer strains,—
Dreams that recall its passion and repose.

For not to any race or clime
Is the completed sphere of life revealed;
He that would make his own that round sublime
Must pitch his tent on many a distant field.

I have spoken of his parodies, with which he outstripped Swinburne or any other in that difficult branch of the rhymester's art. I should give a specimen. Take this of Mrs. Sigourney at her—shall we say, worst?

OBITUARY

On the Death of the Rev. Elijah Batey.

Ay, bear him to his sainted rest,
Ye mourners, but be calm!
Instead of dirge and sable crest,
Raise ye thanksgiving psalm!
For he was old and full of years,
The grandsire of your souls:
Then check ye now your heaving tears,
And quench the sigh that rolls!

Ye heard him from yon pulpit preach
For sixty years and more,
Still battering with unwearied speech
The ceiling, pews, and floor;
As, hour by hour, his periods fell,
Your pious hopes arose,
And each one murmured, "All is well,"
Long ere the sermon's close.

Think ye the voice that spake so long
Can anywhere be dumb?
Before him went a goodly throng
And wait for him to come.
He preaches still, in other spheres,
To saved and patient souls;
Then, mourners, check your heaving tears,
And quench the sigh that rolls!

"The Lay of Macaroni," his parody on Swinburne, is equally apt.

As a wave that steals when the winds are stormy
From creek to cove of the curving shore,
Buffeted, blown, and broken before me,
Scattered and spread to its sunlit core—

Boker and Taylor were caught full tide by the great swirl of the Civil War. Boker's "Dirge for a Soldier," is as excellent a threnody as we have produced, and Taylor's "To the American People," was a trumpet call.

In this division belongs T. Buchanan Read with his "Sheridan's Ride," time-worn and frayed in much declamation but still one of the best of our war ballads. He was an ambitious and industrious singer, filling 340 closely printed pages in his collected works, but little else than the "Ride" remains of him. Yet "Drifting" deserved a better fate.

Round purple peaks
It sails, and seeks

Blue inlets and their crystal creeks,
Where high rocks throw,
Through deeps below,
A duplicated golden glow.

Women in America have always occupied a place of almost peculiar dignity and freedom. They had not failed to be touched with the steadily rising tide of cultural development. We are not to overlook the historical fact that a woman, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, wrote the most stirring song of the Civil War; the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" soon became an imperishable national classic. Mrs. Julia C. R. Dorr, Lucy Larcom, and Mrs. Elizabeth Akers were producing throughout this period, poetry of charm and inspiration that often showed an unusual technical mastership. Among them was this lyric by Mrs. Dorr:

TWO PATHS

A path across a meadow fair and sweet,
Where clover-blooms the lithesome grasses greet,
A path worn smooth by his impetuous feet.

A straight, swift path—and at its end, a star
Gleaming behind the lilac's fragrant bar,
And her soft eyes, more luminous by far!

A path across the meadow fair and sweet,
Still sweet and fair where blooms and grasses meet—
A path worn smooth by his reluctant feet.

A long, straight path—and, at its end, a gate
Behind whose bars she doth in silence wait
To keep the tryst—if he come soon or late!

The last of this group was Richard Henry Stoddard, to whose career there is hardly a fellow. His father was a sea captain; he himself was a laborer in an iron mill, with no education beyond the public schools and not much of that. Like Lincoln, he educated himself by reading at night when the day's work was done, and with this homespun equipment became one of the most noted poets, critics, essayists, journalists, and leaders of taste of his day. He edited magazines, conducted literary departments in daily newspapers, wrote biographies of famous poets, overflowed into articles, essays and editorials and wrote poetry of the kind that might be expected of a sensitive spirit with rather a somber cast. His threnody on Abraham Lincoln

> Not as when some great Captain falls
> In battle, where his Country calls—

most drew the general attention.

Chapter Six

A GROUP OF SOUTHERNERS

THROUGH all these years Boston had kept its place as the acknowledged cultural capital of the United States. The fact is now forgotten, but she had elbowed Philadelphia from this eminence to lose it herself after two generations. So long as it was hers she reigned (in the view of outsiders), with more than a touch of self-complacency, and some said, of arrogance. In this mood, as she dominated current literature and criticism, her own opinion was more or less enforced upon the country that little really worth the noting was produced outside of a radius of twenty miles from the State House. By this ingenious process, poets of merit and quality that happened to live in another latitude failed of recognition they merited. Poe rebelled more than once against this condition but "small ease he gat of playing on the bones." Unruffled by protest, the general tone of Bostonian literature continued to be confident—in this particular.

Among those that suffered in consequence were the singers of the South. Literary inter-

est has always been strong in that region. In the early part of the nineteenth century, reviews and periodicals devoted to literature were commoner there than in the North. Poe was for a time editor of one that had support when Richmond, in which it was published, was not much more than a village. St. George Tucker, Francis Scott Key, Richard Henry Wilde, M. B. Lamar, George Dennison Prentice, Edward Coate Pinkney, William Gilmore Simms, among our early poets, were Southerners. Poe said of Pinkney that "had he been a New Englander, it is probable he would have been ranked as the first of American lyrists, by that magnanimous cabal which has so long controlled the destinies of American letters in conducting the thing called *The North American Review*." The South was the first part of the country to develop a leisured class and there it assumed a genuine interest in literature that the later coming leisure class in the North never attained.

Pinkney undoubtedly lost much by underestimate, from whatsoever cause; but a still more conspicuous sufferer in that way was Henry Timrod.

He was born in Charleston, a poet and the son of a poet. The seventeen years of his

maturity he gave to literature. In the tiny city of Columbia, South Carolina, a typical Southern center of culture, flourished a literary society and a sincere interest in poetry and poets. Timrod went there to live and thence sent to the *Southern Literary Messenger* his verses and thoughtful studies. The Civil War ruined him, physically and financially. He died two years after its close when he was only thirty-eight. What he was as a poet can be gathered from his remarkable "Hymn" which he wrote for the consecration of a cemetery in Charleston.

Whose was the hand that painted thee, O Death!
  In the false aspect of a ruthless foe,
Despair and sorrow waiting on thy breath,—
  O gentle Power! who could have wronged thee so?

Thou rather should'st be crowned with fadeless flowers,
  Of lasting fragrance and celestial hue;
Or be thy couch amid funereal bowers,
  But let the stars and sunlight sparkle through.

So, with these thoughts before us, we have fixed
  And beautified, O Death! thy mansion here,
Where gloom and gladness—grave and garden—mixed,
  Make it a place to love, and not to fear.

Timrod had been a protegé of Simms and had for schoolmate and soul brother, Paul Hamilton Hayne, whose fame has fared better. Outliving by twenty years the fall of the

Rebellion and the passions of the Civil War, Hayne had the fairer chance; yet while his scope and his appeal were alike broader than Timrod's, his gift was not surer. He wrote lyrics in a variety of keys, wrote with firmness of touch and all of a poet's vision; at his best in tenderly reflective passages, such as make up all of his "A Little While." It is a profoundly melancholy song, but I am not sure that more inevitable poetry has been written among us.

A little while I fain would linger here;
Behold! who knows what soul-dividing bars
Earth's faithful loves may part in other stars?
Nor can love deem the face of death is fair;
A little while I fain would linger here.

He made good sonnets, also.

Between the sunken sun and the new moon,
I stood in fields through which a rivulet ran
With scarce perceptible motion, not a span
Of its smooth surface trembling to the tune
Of sunset breezes: "O delicious boon,"
I cried, "of quiet! wise is Nature's plan,
Who, in her realm, as in the soul of man,
Alternates storm with calm, and the loud noon
With dewey evening's soft and sacred lull:
Happy the heart that keeps its twilight hour,
And, in the depths of heavenly peace reclined,
Loves to commune with thoughts of tender power;
Thoughts that ascend, like angels beautiful,
A shining Jacob's ladder of the mind."

The cause of the Confederacy produced many singers and stirring songs. John Williamson Palmer of Baltimore, who wrote "The Maryland Line," one of the best ballads that celebrate the American Revolution, was also the author of "Stonewall Jackson's Way," and other Confederate hymnals. Albert Pike, with his "Dixie" topped all the rest. He was sixty-one years old when the Civil War came, but surpassed many younger men in the field as with the pen. He was not by birth Southern, being a native of Boston, but went early to Arkansas and became imbued with the Southern point of view. Poet he was, long before war came to test his manhood and his singing. A poem of his, published so far back as 1839, won the rare distinction of laudation in England, still sceptical of America in literature. His "Mocking Bird" was long a favorite with his readers, but is marred by too many suggestions of Keats on one hand and of Shelley on the other. Philip Pendleton Cooke, who wrote the hymn "Life in the Autumn Woods," was a Virginian. Theodore O'Hara, whose "Bivouac of the Dead" is so often quoted, was a Kentuckian. His most famous poem was written to the memory of the Kentuckians that fell in the battle of Buena Vista.

Sons of the Dark and Bloody Ground,
Ye must not slumber there,
Where stranger steps and tongues resound
Along the heedless air.
Your own proud land's heroic soil
Shall be your fitter grave:
She claims from war his richest spoil—
The ashes of her brave.

Margaret Junkin Preston, native of Philadelphia, married a Southerner and took up the Southern cause. She was a skilled and fervent poet with a distinction, rather unusual among women poets, in her untrammeled stanzas. Her "Shade of the Trees," written to honor Stonewall Jackson, has seven quatrain stanzas and in each the last line is "Under the shade of the trees," which were Jackson's last words, and the second line throughout rhymes with this.

James Ryder Randall, who wrote "Maryland, My Maryland," that "Marseillaise of the Confederacy," was a Baltimorean and published several volumes of verse. Father Ryan, poet, priest and soldier, was a Virginian. His "Conquered Banner," is a threnody sung above the Confederacy's lost cause, the more impressive that it is without bitterness.

Furl that banner, softly, slowly!
Treat it gently—it is holy,

For it droops above the dead.
Touch it not—unfold it never;
Let it droop there, furled forever,—
For its people's hopes are fled!

But, excepting only Poe, the greatest singer the South ever produced, and assuredly one of the greatest of Americans, was Sidney Lanier. He also was of that astonishing brood that sang and fought and sang and wrecked their lives in war, and sang still. Nothing more heroic is recorded of the American conflict than the courage with which this man combated the disease he had incurred in the southern trenches. He was not only a poet and soldier; he was a musician and a profound thinker about and investigator of the basic principles of music and verse. The theory he demonstrated of the kinship of these arts, and especially the theory of the musical basis of verse making, have been followed throughout the present book. Lanier's instrument was the flute, on which he was a remarkable performer, being for years first flutist in the Peabody Symphony Orchestra of Baltimore.

The touch of the musician, whether born or trained, is unescapable in poetry. Sometimes it is unconscious, as with Shelley and Poe, and sometimes it is mastership, as with

Milton and Lanier; but in every instance it is unescapable. Milton knew perfectly well that his great lines in "Lycidas" were the analogue of music he had played on the organ; Lanier made word melodies quite as deliberate and frank.

Out of the hills of Habersham,
Down the valleys of Hall,
I hurry amain to reach the plain,
Run the rapid and leap the fall,
Split at the rock and together again,
Accept my bed, or narrow or wide,
And flee from folly on every side
With a lover's pain to attain the plain
Far from the hills of Habersham,
Far from the valleys of Hall.

High o'er the hills of Habersham,
Veiling the valleys of Hall,
The hickory told me manifold
Fair tales of shade, the poplar tall
Wrought me her shadowy self to hold,
The chestnut, the oak, the walnut, the pine,
Overleaning, with flickering meaning and sign,
Said, Pass not, so cold, these manifold
Deep shades of the hills of Habersham,
These glades in the valleys of Hall.

He has used here with the musician's clear perception, the full value of the double refrain at the beginning and the close of each stanza. The beat of the rhythm is the perfect echo of the exultant swift rush of the

river; there was never a better adjustment of time beat to subject.

> I hurry amain to reach the plain,
> Run the rapid and leap the fall.

It is really great art. Poe was not wiser in "The Raven."

The peculiarities of his musicianship were manifested again in "The Symphony," a long and little-read poem that he strove to build in something of the manner of a symphonic movement, with a theme and a development passage and episode, variously treated. There occurs in the early parts of it one of the curiosities of verse in the shape of four lines with a usage of internal rhymes for which he had no perfect precedent.

> We *weave* in the mills and *heave* in the kilns,
> We *sieve* mine-meshes under the *hills*,
> And *thieve* much gold from the Devil's bank *tills*,
> To *relieve*, O God, what manner of *ills?*

Without a doubt he took the hint of this extraordinary arrangement from a symphony, and I think likely from Schubert's C major.

"The Marshes of Glynn" is the best known of his singing. It ought to have been celebrated as marking a new day in American poetry.

> Beautiful glooms, soft dusks in the noon-day fire,—
> Wildwood privacies, closets of lone desire,

Chamber from chamber parted with wavering arras of leaves,—
Cells for the passionate pleasure of prayer to the soul that grieves,
Pure with a sense of the passing of saints through the wood,
Cool for the dutiful weighing of ill with good;—
O braided dusks of the oak and woven shades of the vine,
While the riotous noon-day sun of the June-day long did shine
Ye held me fast in your heart and I held you fast in mine;
But now when the noon is no more, and the riot is rest,
And the sun is a-wait at the ponderous gate of the West,
And the slant yellow beam down the wood-aisle doth seem
Like a lane into heaven that leads from a dream,—

He did not like Swinburne, so it is not probable he took any suggestion from him. Observe then the strange analogy of the two musician poets working upon similar themes, for in Swinburne's "Evening on the Broads" is this:

Northward, lonely for miles, ere ever a village begin,
On the lapsing land that recedes as the growth of the strong sea strengthens
Shoreward, thrusting further and further its outworks in,

and in "The Marshes of Glynn" is this:

Sinuous southward and sinuous northward the shimmering band

Of the sand-beach fastens the fringe of the marsh
to the folds of the land,
Inward and outward to northward and southward the
beach-lines linger and curl
As a silver-wrought garment that clings to and follows the firm sweet limbs of a girl.

He was a close friend and warm admirer of Bayard Taylor and it was a coincidence that must have given pleasure to both when Taylor was chosen to write the Centennial celebration ode and Lanier to write the cantata for the same occasion. Dudley Buck wrote the music; Theodore Thomas conducted it, the greatest triad the times afforded for this particular occasion. Lanier made on the margin of his manuscript a series of notes for the composer's guidance, explaining what the music should be. In his letter accompanying the manuscript he made a comment about our prosody of a kind that probably no other man of that day could have made. He said:

"I adopted the trochees of the first movement because they compel a measured, sober, and meditative movement of the mind, and because, too, they are not the genius of our language. When the troubles cease and the land emerges as a distinct unity, then I fall into our native iambics."

Behold the advantages of a poet that is also a musician!

Chapter Seven

ARNOLD, ALDRICH, HOWELLS AND OTHERS

TO BE classed with Drake for the pathetic brevity of his life and the clarity of his genius is George Arnold, who died in his thirty-second year, leaving an impression of a frustrated career brilliant in promise. He must have been of extraordinary spirit, to judge by the memorials of his friends. William Winter, who wrote his biography and edited his poems, acknowledged that he found it impossible to speak of him impartially. He was born in old Bedford Street, New York City, in 1834; was taken when he was three years old to live in Alton, Illinois; and never went to school, being educated by his parents. Three years of residence at a Fourierists' colony in New Jersey gave him a bent toward social reform and reformers that he never lost. He was intended for a portrait painter, came short of success, and turned to literature and journalism. A series of articles he wrote in the assumed character of the Chevalier McArone have a place in the history of American letters for their peculiar satirical

humor laid over a substratum of philosophy. He was musician as well as artist, and used to compose music for his songs. The last hours of his life he spent sitting at a piano and softly singing to himself.

For the most part, the best of his poems were on nature subjects; his song of "September" being of these the one most often quoted and cited.

Sweet is the voice that calls
From babbling waterfalls
In meadows where the downy seeds are flying;
And soft the breezes blow,
And eddying come and go,
In faded gardens where the rose is dying.

Among the stubbled corn
The blithe quail pipes at morn,
The merry partridge drums in hidden places,
And glittering insects gleam
Above the reedy stream
Where busy spiders spin their filmy laces . . .

The pollen-dusted bees
Search for the honey-lees
That linger in the last flowers of September,
While plaintive mourning doves
Coo sadly to their loves
Of the dead summer they so well remember . . .

Yet, though a sense of grief
Come with the falling leaf,
And memory makes the summer doubly pleasant,
In all my autumn dreams
A future summer gleams,
Passing the fairest glories of the present!

According to tradition, his way of life in New York was not what one would call godly, but he had a strong and apparently sincere religious strain in his nature, and if he roistered he also prayed; a curious union of Villon and George Herbert observable in other instances. It is easy to see how he must have kept the table in a roar when he started upon one of his fanciful harangues, for he had a marvelous clever wit. Among his skits was a parody of one of Bryant's most popular poems. Arnold called it "The Drinking of the Apple-jack."

> The glory of this apple-jack
> Winds and our flag of stripe and star
> Shall bear to coasts that lie afar,
> Where men shall drink till all is blue
> The apple-jack of Sandymew;
> And they who roam upon the sea
> Shall mourn the last but happy day
> When grog made labor seem like play,
> The day of apple-jack.

Once notable figures on the literary horizon, the Piatts, John J. and Sarah, seemed to disappear almost mysteriously when their span was run. The lyrics the husband had written of life and nature in the Middle West had been assigned an enduring place for their true and vivid coloring. Perhaps there awaits them a resurrection like that of Alcilia.

I lift this sumach-bough with crimson flare,
And, touched with subtle pangs of dreamy pain,
Through the dark wood a torch I seem to bear
In Autumn's funeral train.

His wife, called by Stedman "our best known Western poet," had a sweetly grave and tender vein that endeared her at the time to an admiring constituency apparently not renewed. Her pathetic little "Envoy" is a fair example of the spirit in which she worked.

Sweet World, if you will hear me now:
I may not own a sounding Lyre
And wear my name upon my brow
Like some great jewel quick with fire

But let me, singing, sit apart,
In tender quiet with a few,
And keep my fame upon my heart,
A little blush rose wet with dew.

John Hay's "Jim Bludso" and "Little Breeches," in his "Pike County Ballads," caught the popular fancy with their broad human touches. The first engineer of the *Prairie Belle* has probably a place in literature like Ancient Pistol's. He is too handy and useful to be forgotten. Otherwise, the "Pike County Ballads" are inconsiderable as poetry. It is to be noted that the author, who in all his middle and later life was a most con-

spicuous conservative, not to say reactionary, began his career as an advanced radical. Strange as it may seem, he wrote, and the old *Atlantic Monthly* published, a poem on the Paris Commune that both would have been embarrassed to have dug up in later times, and Hay's magnificent "Liberty" breathed the true spirit of democracy. But similar transformations have not been unknown elsewhere. Recall what Browning wrote about Wordsworth; likewise the sad lapse of Coleridge.

Louise Chandler Moulton, the friend and editor of Philip Bourke Marston, was long our most conspicuous woman singer. A native of Pomfret, Connecticut, and born in 1833, she was never quite able to shake off the Puritan notion that poetry must be missionary or be naught. Yet she had soul enough for another employment, if she had so wished.

Were but my spirit loosed upon the air,—
  By some High Power that could Life's chains unbind,
  Set free to seek what most it longs to find,—
To no proud court of kings would I repair:
I would but climb, once more, a narrow stair,
  When day was wearing late, and dusk was kind;
  And one should greet me to my failings blind,
Content so I but shared his twilight there.

Nay! well I know he waits not as of old,—
I could not find him in the old-time place,—
I must pursue him, made by sorrow bold,
Through worlds unknown, in strange celestial race,
Whose mystic round no traveler has told,
From star to star, until I see his face.

Theodore Tilton, that strange figure in a strange tragedy, had with his unusual gift of oratory a gift of song. His "Flight from the Convent" has a rare romantic touch. William Winter's lyrics seem now rather stilted and artificial, but in their day they had wide commendation. The women were writing extremely well; a whole new tribe of them had appeared to win fresh honors for American womanhood, Anna C. Brackett, Celia Thaxter, and others. Mrs. Thaxter was most concerned with aspects of nature and she made of the scenery and weather of Cape Ann some unforgettable pictures.

But the greatest genius of this group and truest poet was Aldrich.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich, born at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1836, taken as a child to live in Louisiana, was thence returned to a life in Portsmouth that he has made imperishable in his "Bad Boy." Without college training, he went to New York when he was but seventeen and started to earn his living with his pen. A long and brilliant

career followed in periodical journalism and literature. He was a kind of better and more successful George Arnold, witty, gay, clever, but ballasted with a serious purpose and steering for high ideals. For some years he was editor of *Every Saturday* and then of the *Atlantic*. His best work was done in his younger days. He seems to have had a latent weakness for comfort and not too much exertion, but part of his endowment was also a firm, true hold upon the pictorial side of poetic composition, which enabled him to take high place as a sonneteer. His literary portrait is of delicate sensibilities and a spirit more graceful than resolute. One of his sonnets, "Fredericksburg," is a familiar model among modern students of poetic form, and another, "Enamored Architect of Airy Rhyme," is the favorite of the anthologists. His "Judith," his most remarkable achievement and worth a high place in the literature of any nation, is seldom mentioned; probably because it did not exactly fit into his accepted niche. It is powerfully told in vital blank verse; powerfully and with a restraint that augments the power. The artist came to redeem this difficult vehicle as the musician came to redeem it with Taylor. One does not notice the blankness of the verse because one

is too much taken up with the pictures. Where were the use of a cinematograph before true verse wizardry?

One cresset twinkled dimly in the tent
Of Holofernes, and Bagoas, his slave,
Lay prone across the matting at the door,
Drunk with the wine of slumber, but his lord
Slept not, or, sleeping, rested not for thought
Of Judith's beauty. Two large lucent eyes,
Tender and full as moons, dawned on his sleep;
And when he woke, they filled the vacant dusk
With an unearthly splendor. All night long
A stately figure glided through his dream;
Sometimes a queenly diadem weighed down
Its braided tresses, and sometimes it came
Draped only in a misty cloud of veils,
Like the King's dancing-girls at Nineveh.
And once it bent above him in the gloom,
And touched his forehead with most hungry lips.
Then Holofernes turned upon his couch,
And, yearning for the daybreak, slept no more.

He should have been a good dramatist, this man, for he had the sense of dramatic values and saw all things vividly. After *Judith* has slain her lover and her nation's foe:

. . . . . she fled into the yawning dark,
There met her maid, who, stealing to the tent,
Pulled down the crimson arras on the corse,
And in her mantle wrapt the brazen head,
And brought it with her; and a great gong boomed
Twelve, as the women glided past the guard
With measured footstep: but outside the camp,
Terror seized on them, and they fled like wraiths

Through the hushed midnight into the black woods,
Where, from gnarled roots and ancient, palsied trees,
Dread shapes, upstarting, clutched at them; and once
A nameless bird in branches overhead
Screeched, and the blood grew cold about their hearts.
By mouldy caves, the hooded viper's haunt,
Down perilous steeps, and through the desolate gorge,
Onward they flew, with madly streaming hair,
Bearing their hideous burden, till at last,
Wild with the pregnant horrors of the night,
They dashed themselves against the City's gate.

Next morning an Arab comes to the Assur camp

With a strange story of a Head that hung
High in the air above the City's wall—
A livid Head with knotted, snake-like curls—
And how the face was like a face he knew,
And how it turned and twisted in the wind,
And how it stared upon him with fixt orbs,
Till it was not in mortal man to stay;
And how he fled, and how he thought the Thing
Came bowling through the wheat-fields after him.

The mind that conceived this powerful picture had also this dainty vision:

We knew it would rain, for all the morn,
A spirit on slender ropes of mist
Was lowering its golden buckets down
Into the vapory amethyst—

He was the first American poet to make a special development of the quatrain and succeed notably in it. Here is one—on "Popularity."

Such kings of shreds have wooed and won her,
Such crafty knaves her laurel owned,
It has become almost an honor
Not to be crowned.

COQUETTE

Or light or dark, or short or tall,
She sets a spring to snare them all;
All's one to her—above her fan
She'd make sweet eyes at Caliban.

Once he sang,

A man should live in a garret aloof,
And have few friends, and go meanly clad,
With an old hat stopping the chink in the roof,
To keep the Goddess constant and glad.

He must do still more if he is to retain what reputation he has been able to win—he must keep closely to his art. The place of Edmund Clarence Stedman is fixed as an exegetical critic of poetry, but almost vanished as a poet. It was no prosaic essayist that wrote of the death of Horace Greeley:

Earth, let thy softest mantle rest
On this worn child to thee returning,
Whose youth was nurtured at thy breast,
Who loved thee with such tender yearning!
He knew thy fields and woodland ways,
And deemed thy humblest son his brother:—
Asleep, beyond our blame or praise,
We yield him back, O gentle Mother.

"How Old Brown Took Harper's Ferry" is one of the most vigorous protests in the

language and fit almost to stand alongside of Lowell's "Present Crisis."

And Old Brown,
Osawatomie Brown,

Saw his sons fall dead beside him, and between them
laid him down . . .
But, Virginians, don't do it! for I tell you that the
flagon,
Filled with blood of Old Brown's offspring, was first
poured by Southern hands;
And each drop from Old Brown's life-veins, like the
red gore of the dragon,
May spring up a vengeful Fury, hissing through
your slave-worn lands.

And Old Brown,
Osawatomie Brown,

May trouble you more than ever when you've nailed
his coffin down!

William Dean Howells was another; when he turned from poetry to novel-writing he lost to the world a good poet, one that could picture earliest spring in the Western country.

Tossing his mane of snows in wildest eddies and
tangles,
Lion-like, March cometh in, hoarse, with tempes-
tuous breath,
Through all the moaning chimneys, and thwart all
the hollows and angles
Round the shuddering house, threating of winter
and death.

Margaret E. Sangster, Mary Mapes Dodge, Edna D. Proctor, Charlotte F. Bates, and

Amelia W. Carpenter were among the women that graced this period with their songs. One that seems now to have had original gifts, albeit not used to the full, was Nora Perry, whom George Cary Eggleston used to call "Little Spitfire." She had unconventional themes if not always unconventional expression. This is her poem called "Discontent":

Before my steps she hovering flits,
My foe,—the demon Discontent;
Or at my side she sadly sits
With restless mien and eyes down-bent.

Most times, however, she doth lift
Her gaze beyond to something far;
I look, and through a cloudy rift
I see the shining of a star.

Why should I strive that star to gain?
My heart is faint, my courage spent;
Why should I leave the grassy plain,
O cruel, cruel Discontent.

But as I cry, "Oh why, Oh why?"
She turns on me a wondering gaze,
And wonderingly doth make reply:
"I lead you out of slothful ways.

"I spur you on to win the race
For which you languish overspent;
No foe am I, but by God's grace,
I am—the angel Discontent."

Bret Harte's verse has gone with his prose into present eclipse, and whether either will

really emerge one guess is as valid as another. Offhand, one would say that work so clever and once so famous among the nations as "The Heathen Chinee" could hardly perish; but the path of poetry through the world is littered with similar fragments. By a supreme audacity, he lifted the stanzaic form of this humorous flight from "Atalanta in Calydon," a statement that has been challenged but is easily proved even if we did not have Harte's own word for it.

He wrote other things as clever.

It was Andrew Jackson Sutter who, despising Mr. Cutter for remarks he heard him utter in debate upon the floor,
Swung him up into the skylight, in the peaceful, pensive twilight, and then keerlessly proceeded, makin' no account what *we* did—
To wipe up with his person casual dust upon the floor.

and

Waltz in, waltz in, ye little kids, and gather round my knee,
And drop them books and first pot-hooks, and hear a yarn from me.
I kin not sling a fairy tale of Jinnys fierce and wild,
For I hold it is unchristian to deceive a simple child.

His serious verses were often done with an oddly dexterous touch. "Crotalus" is a singular poem on a singular subject, treated

with the deliberated detail that made so much in his stories.

> The hare, transfixed, with trembling lip,
> Halts, breathless, on pulsating hip,
> And palsied tread, and heels that slip.
>
> . . . Thou! whose fame
> Searchest the grass with tongue of flame,
> Making all creatures seem thy game;
> When the whole woods before thee run,
> Asked but—when all was said and done—
> To lie, untrodden, in the sun!

Joaquin Miller has gone through even more than the ordinary pendulum swing that waits upon all poetic reputations. He went from a state in which he was called the only poet America ever produced to a state in which he was declared to be no poet at all, and only imposing upon a credulous world with his blue shirt and his trousers in his boots. Taylor was unmerciful about him, calling his characters spurious and much of his verse a travesty of poetry. "He takes Lara and the Giaour, puts them in an impossible, fantastic country called Arizona or California, and describes them with a rhythm borrowed from Swinburne and a frenzy all his own." He was not so bad as that, even at his worst. Some of his longer poems are but dreary stuff to read, being a kind of

rhymed prose, often rather clumsily done, but he had the poet's feeling and at times showed that he knew how to make simple and genuine verse. Much can be forgiven the man that wrote the remarkable song beginning

I tell you that love is the bitterest sweet
  That ever laid hold on the heart of a man—

I say to you surely that grief shall befall;
  I lift you my finger, I caution you true,
  And yet you go forward, laugh gayly, and you
Must learn for yourself, then mourn for us all . . .

The clouds are above us, and snowy and cold,
  And what is beyond but the steel-gray sky,
  And the still far stars that twinkle and lie
Like the eyes of a love or delusions of gold!

What he wrote about the Pacific Ocean has characteristics of his best.

Here room and kingly silence keep
Companionship in state austere;
The dignity of death is here,
The large, lone vastness of the deep;
Here toil has pitched his camp to rest:
The west is banked against the west.

Chapter Eight

FAWCETT, GILDER, EMMA LAZARUS

IN THE *Current*, a short-lived literary journal of Chicago, appeared in June, 1884, an article entitled "A Neglected Singer" that strove to direct attention to one Edgar Fawcett, citing that for years he had toiled unobtrusively but honestly at his art, had demonstrated his calling, had written many poems of great beauty and power, and, despite all, had somehow missed the mark of the world's acclaim. Selections that proved the poet's endowment were accompanied with comments judicious and impartial.

Even this well-meant and well-based lariat-cast at elusive glory failed of its aim, and the poet returned unlaureled to the dust. Stedman's "American Anthology" contains the names of 773 American poets great and small, heralded and otherwise, and his is not among them.

All this time he was writing poetry and printing it in magazines and books. That is the strangest part of his strange story. The best magazines seem to have welcomed his

verse, and yet none of it would hang where it struck. Even the all-inclusive Epes Sargent collection contains but one specimen of his work, and that far from his best.

Yet lodged away in this man's unread pages is what must be regarded from the colorist's point of view as one of the most wonderful sonnets in the language. Read it with care and see if this is not true:

SLEEP
(For a Picture)

A yellow sunset, soft and dreamy of dye,
  Met sharply by black fluctuant lines of grass;
  A river, gleaming like illumined glass,
And narrowing till it ends in distant sky;
Pale scattered pools of luminous rain, that lie
  In shadowy amplitudes of green morass;
A crescent that the old moon, as moments pass,
Has turned to a silver acorn hung on high!

Now through this melancholy and silent land
  Sleep walks, diaphanous-vestured, vaguely fair,
Within her vaporous robe and one dim hand
  Much asphodel and lotus doth she bear,
Going lovely and low-lidded, with a band
  Of dull-red poppies in her dull-gold hair.

Not even the immortal sestette of "Stout Cortez when with eagle eyes," has surer picturing and the touch of the "dull-red poppies in her dull-gold hair," Alma-Tadema has never exceeded. We have noted the develop-

ment of the melodic side of poetry; here the picture-making side shows its advance. This man was all for painting.

He achieved it again in his little poem called "An Interior," which had no reason to exist except this same reason of appealing in verse to the inner referee that, after all, must determine of all our visions, whether transmitted through the ponderable eye or the imponderable.

A chamber where the wainscot woods
Are rich with dark shapes, odd of mold,
And where the time-touched arras hangs
In blendings of blue, green, and gold.

And dimly pictured, gleam the walls,
With her bluff huntsmen, all at tryst;
Here mounted knights; a falcon, here,
Wide-winged upon a lady's wrist.

There fruits in luscious color glow,
All that the daintiest whim could ask,
And garnet wine that brightly fills
A frail fantastic crystal flask.

And crouching at her feet a hound,
Lean, slack, and pale-gray like a dove,—

He could tell a story well, as "Tharak and the Lion" and "The Carisfort Curse" attest, and he had a good sense of dramatic art as in the sketches "The Icicle" and "How a Queen Loved." It is true, of course, that he turned

aside from poetry to write the things more productive of daily bread, and did well as a novelist and dramatist. The singular thing is that even when men read and admired the work the name of the workman would not abide with them. His play "A False Friend" had a long run in New York; his remarkable novel "The Evil Men Do," which as a picture of New York life has seldom been excelled, went into many editions. And yet would not Gloria abide with him, although whosoever today wishes to see how far the pictorial aspect of poetry has been carried in America must turn to the works of Edgar Fawcett.

The career of Richard Watson Gilder might well be taken as an example of the active man of letters that was in the world yet managed to keep himself and his ideals unspotted from it. There was never one of a loftier conception of the mission of literature or of the whole duty of a scholar to the Republic. Wendell Phillips himself, in his great Phi Beta Kappa address, had scarcely a better notion of it. Gilder carried his faith so far that he even believed poetry might be drafted in the war of righteousness against Tammany Hall, or to rebuke the tergiversations of Congress. The English have done a great

deal of this; it has never taken much root with us. But Gilder could make pure poetry when he so desired. On a theme of intellectual inspiration, with a touch of high philosophy and not too much concerned about the objective, he sang with precision and power.

When the true poet comes, how shall we know him?
  By what clear token,—manners, language, dress?
Or will a voice from heaven speak and show him,—
  Him the swift healer of the earth's distress?
Tell us, that when the long-expected comes
  At last, with mirth and melody and singing,
We him may greet with banners, beat of drums,
  Welcome of men and maids and joybells ringing:
    And for this poet of ours,
    Laurels and flowers.

Thus shall ye know him, this shall be his token,—
  Manners like other men, an unstrange gear,
His speech not musical, but harsh and broken
  Will sound at first, each line a driven spear.
For he will sing as in the centuries olden,
  Before mankind its earliest fire forgot—
Yet whoso listens long hears music golden.
  —How shall ye know him? Ye shall know him not
    Till, ended hate and scorn,
    To the grave he's borne.

The closeness to nature that from the beginning has distinguished American poetry has had no exponent nobler than John Burroughs, who left a position in the government service to live on a farm and be near his beloved birds, bees and flowers. In many

volumes of prose he gave to the world the results of his minute study of the ways and loveliness of his feathered friends. What this communion may do for the spirit he reflected in a poem that has been reprinted thousands of times, translated into many languages, and may be said to have gone around the world, so much has it meant to the struggling hearts of men beset in the world's tangle.

Serene, I fold my hands and wait,
Nor care for wind, or tide, or sea;
I rave no more, 'gainst time or fate,
For, lo! my own shall come to me.

I stay my haste, I make delays,
For what avails this eager pace?
I stand amid the eternal ways,
And what is mine shall know my face.

The waters know their own and draw
The brook that springs to yonder height;
So flows the good with equal law
Unto the soul of pure delight.

What was at first only the thinnest jet of tune coming unnoticed out of the New England ground had by this time grown into a great river. The number of worthy poets had become beyond reckoning. It is no longer possible to cite more than a few that might be deemed examples of the characteristics of American song. Universal education was re-

sulting in a culture more widely spread than had ever before been known. The days of giants came to an end; men began to wonder whether there had ever been giants, whether the outstanding figures had only seemed great because projected against a mediocre background. With the vast increase of the habit of reading came a like increase in the desire for expression. The beginning of the twentieth century saw no commanding figures in American poetry occupying the niches left by Bryant, Poe and Longfellow, but it saw scores of poets that fifty years before would have been hailed as wonder-workers. Ironic commentators on these phenomena began to ask if we had reached the stage of civilization in which every man was to be his own poet and sing diligently to an enraptured audience of one. It was scarcely a wild exaggeration. There is a democracy of letters as well as of politics. It has yet to be shown that the two are wholly separable. And if any one is tempted to mourn the fact that the overshadowing genius is not likely to return among men, such a one can find compensation in the thought that millions of homes now brightened by the spread of poetry and by the spread of music would have been two generations ago without hope of either.

In this great expansion of literary activity, whosoever would attempt to select the workers that have done best, would have a difficult task. What is best? What do we know about the forces that work unseen today and flower thirty years hence? All I can do is to make a few selections from among the poets that have meant most to me, knowing well enough that they may not have the same meaning to any one else, but helpless to search for another guide. For, at last, from the superstition of the schoolmen that there is any such thing as a standard or mete-wand to be applied to literature we are beginning to be set free. Therefore:

Sonnets may perhaps be taken as affording a fair gauge of the growth anywhere of the poetic principle and practise, because the sonnet is at once the most difficult form of verse and the most alluring. The closing of the last century saw in America the appearance of a group of sonnet-makers of a new vigor and firmness of workmanship. Among these shines Lloyd Mifflin.

He was born in 1846 at Columbia, Pennsylvania, the son of an artist, and himself trained to the same calling, a fact that again verifies belief that only the colorists can make good sonnets.

MILTON

His feet were shod with music and had wings
  Like Hermes: far upon the peaks of song
  His sandals sounded silverly along;
The dull world blossomed into beautous things
Where'er he trod; and Heliconistic springs
  Gushed from the rocks he touched; round him a throng
  Of fair invisibles, seraphic, strong,
Struck Orphean murmurs out of golden strings.

  But he, spreading keen pinions for a white
    Immensity of radiance and of peace,
  Up-looming to the Empyrean infinite,
    Far through ethereal fields, and zenith seas,
    High, with strong wing-beats and with eagle ease,
  Soared in a solitude of glorious light!

This easy master of the sonnet form put it to uncommon uses; he even made it serve for a drama in little, as here:

THESEUS AND ARIADNE

Thes. Nay, I have loved thee!
Ari. Thou hast loved, didst say?
Thes. I loved thee well at Crete.
Ari. Lov'st me no more?
Thes. Ah! who can hold the wave upon the shore?
Ari. Thou, if thou wouldst; and, oh! is that the way
  Thou speak'st to me, who gave thee, on that day,
  My flower of life?
Thes. My ship is ready—sail and oar . . .
Ari. Did I not save thee fom the minotaur?—
  And wilt thou leave me?
Thes. Who can make love stay?
  Wax is my heart and takes full easily
  The last print on't. Past love is past recall.

Adieu! . . . Love has the helm—he guides,
not we. . . .

Ari. Beloved traitor! May thy black sail pall
Deep in the brine, thee, and thy maidens all!
Ye gods! he leaves me and my babe to be!

Well forward in this group appeared a remarkable woman, a Jewess and the first of her people to set forth in English song, uncompromisingly, the wrongs they have suffered.

Emma Lazarus was born in New York City in 1849. Her parents were Jews from Portugal. She wrote poetry even in her childhood and her first volume was published when she was only eighteen. She had a strong dramatic sense and wrote two plays that were received with great applause. At first her genius had followed classical and lyrical studies, but after some years the persecutions of the Jews in Russia and elsewhere awoke in her a kind of deep-burning and irresistible resentment, and from that time on she wrote chiefly protest and appeal. She knew well the whole terrible tragedy of the Jew and sang of it with the voice of a prophetess of old.

Each crime that wakes in man the beast,
Is visited upon his kind.

The lust of mobs, the greed of priest,
The tyranny of kings, combined
To root his seed from earth again,
His record is one cry of pain.

She was the beginning of a long line of tuneful singers among the Jews that have come to America and developed here their inborn strong sense of melody and poetic expression.

Another voice she had for other themes, a most indubitable and charming voice, to linger in one's ear and possess one's spirit, as here:

THE CRANE OF IBYCUS

There was a man who watched the river flow
Past the huge town, one gray November day.
Round him in narrow, high-piled streets at play
The boys made merry as they saw him go,
Murmuring half-aloud, with eyes upon the stream,
The immortal screed he held within his hand.
For he was walking in an April land
With Faust and Helen. Shadowy as a dream
Was the prose-world, the river and the town.
Wild joy possessed him; through enchanted skies
He saw the cranes of Ibycus swoop down.
He closed the page, he lifted up his eyes,
Lo—a black line of birds in wavering thread
Bore him the greetings of the deathless dead!

She died in her thirty-eighth year when her greatness was but beginning to be felt.

She seems to live again in the inspiration she has been not only to the company of brilliant young songsters that came after her, but to those that, aside from the domain of art, struggle and hope for justice.

In some respects, Francis S. Saltus, another native of New York City born in the same year with Miss Lazarus, was hardly less than a phenomenon. He was educated in Paris, lived as a student in the Latin quarter, took on something of its glitter and philosophy of disillusion, spent years in travel until he knew the European capitals better than his own New York, and became so able a linguist that he composed as readily in Italian and French as in American. Even in the sonnet, which was his favorite vehicle, having for him powerful fascination. One of his volumes contained 225 examples, many being in French, many in Italian. One of his achievements was a series of sonnets addressed each to a drink and covering the whole range of potable liquids from arrack to beer; a sad contribution to a prohibitory age. He worked only in true sonnets and did not so slander nomenclature as to call something else by that name. As an example, this is his tribute to the liqueur called Curacoa.

The memory haunts me, when in cheerful ease
I sip thy sweetness, of a land of balm,
Radiant with bowers and labyrinths of palm,
Far in the warm heart of the Celebes!
The golden orange crowns the swaying trees,
In fertile vales there dwells perpetual calm,
Where the swart hunter, free from any qualm,
Gazes on sultry leagues of dazzling seas.

And then strange fancy leads my spirit back
Unto the toil and tumult of a town,
Noisy with traffic and industrious feet.
I see the cheerless silhouette, dull and black,
Of Rotterdam's high minster of renown,
Of Zaandam's markets lashed by wintry sleet!

Probably the poem of his that will most commend itself to the untechnical taste is "The Andalusian Sereno," a simple chant of the watchman of Seville.

He sees the blond moon fleck the rosy towers
Of old giralda with its opal sheen,
And in broad alamedas, warm with flowers,
He sees the Moorish cypress bend and lean.

Then, vaguely dreaming, he recalls the nights
His father passed beneath those very stars,
The tales of escaladed walls, the fights,
The mirth, the songs, the Babel of guitars!

And all his sire had told him years ago,
How, often, in the gardens dim and dark,
He met full many a mantled Romeo,
And stumbled over corpses cold and stark.

Chapter Nine

LATER AND PRESENT TENDENCIES

THE literary overlordship, held so long by the East, was now beginning to slip from it. The West was rising with a larger life and outlook. In 1902 an estimate made from publishers' records showed that the center of the book buying public of the United States was sixty miles southeast of Chicago. Production and consumption are not so far apart. It was the time of the literary ascension of Indiana, the first of whose bards to win an international reputation was Riley.

James Whitcomb Riley, born in Greenfield, Indiana, in 1853, was designed to be a lawyer but frustrated his worthy father's plans by running away to sell patent medicines. From the painting of signs and a brief career on the stage he came to journalism and was a reporter on a Greenfield newspaper, where he began to write comic verse and send it to the Indianapolis *Journal*. This gave him his start toward Parnassus. "Little Orphant Annie" swept at once into almost universal

recognition, "The Ole Swimmin' Hole" touched with boyhood recollections thousands of men grown hard in metropolitan conflicts.

The secret of his extraordinary hold upon the affections of the public was much more than his ability to handle with cleverness and mastery the dialect in which he wrote some of his most popular songs. The sentiment filling and overflowing his perfected verse had a certain frank sincerity and native heart-goodness, strong to pierce the superficial American cynicism and reach springs that never fail one that knows the way to them. He did not have the art that conceals art because he had consciously no art at all; had no art and needed none. If there ever was a perfectly naïve singer on this earth that sang without a thought of his cleverness and because he had something to say that he could not say otherwise than in song, it was this man. Peddling patent medicine had been better for him than the university would have been. The American mind, that baffles all foreigners as a hopeless mystery—he sensed it to its last queer idiosyncrasy. Even when he wrote poetic tributes to men the world scarcely knew or appropriately forgot, states-

men and politicians more ephemeral than summer flies, he was but expressing the native habit of thought that is outwardly scornful and inwardly hopes to leap at any indication of good.

His dialect poems that attained so wide a popularity had in almost every case an ending that laid hold upon this fiber. "A Man by the Name of Bolus," for example, and "The Old Man and Jim"—the simple, clean-minded sincerity, the sympathy with the ultimates of the common heart—wonderful! Perhaps his brief career as an actor gave him some sense of the dramatic, but it was like the rest of his endowment, a gift as unpremeditated as the skylark's. In some ways he was the most genuinely and thoroughly American of all the great array of American poets.

He could do things that were much better than the "Goblins will git you ef you don't watch out," presently recited from a thousand platforms. "Little Haly" is better, a hundred times better, and, outside of dialect, to see what he was really capable of, take "When She Comes Home," and that deathless classic, "An Old Sweetheart of Mine."

I can see the pink sunbonnet and the little checkered
dress

She wore when first I kissed her, and she answered
the caress. . . .

down to

But ah! my dream is broken by a step upon the stair,
And the door is softly opened, and—my wife is
standing there;
Yet with eagerness and rapture all my visions I resign
To greet the living presence of that old sweetheart
of mine.

If there is anything in reincarnation, he must have been Sidney come to earth again. He looked into his heart and wrote. It was a heart big, true and tender, like his songs.

What Emma Lazarus was to the wronged Jews, Paul Lawrence Dunbar was to those other conspicuous victims of prejudice and tyranny, the Negroes. Of pure African descent, he broke by the main strength of his mentality through the barriers that have been thrown around his people, he compelled the acknowledgment of his worth. Like Miss Lazarus, he was both champion and inspiration to his fellow-sufferers. From his brilliant example came in the third decade of the twentieth century a brood of young colored singers whose work gave a new and almost startling development to the trend of our verse-making. The edge of Dunbar's success was his ability to handle the Negro dialect

toward genuinely poetic effects, and then his perfect understanding of the Negro psychology. But he wrote also excellent poetry in the straight-away language of his country. It was things like these that fastened upon him the thoughtful regard of impartial critics.

Lay her here beneath the grass,
Cool and green and sweet,
Where the gentle brook may pass
Crooning at her feet.
Nature's bards shall come and sing,
And the fairest flowers shall spring
Where she lies.

Safe above the water's swirl,
She has crossed the bar;
Earth has lost a precious pearl,
Heaven has gained a star,
That shall ever sing and shine,
Till it quells this grief of mine
For my love.

To pass over so many admirable artists as now began to win for poetry in America a new level of esteem is hard. The limits of this work restrict me to three instances of the modern spirit and I choose three singers that left us before their time, Josephine Preston Peabody, Madison Cawein, and George Sterling.

Miss Peabody (Mrs. Marks), a native of New York City, added to the list of achieve-

ments by American women poets many lyrics of the highest order and a powerful, well considered, compactly written metrical drama. Her works had at their best the latter day glories of sure touch, sure vision, authoritative utterance and the charm of a speculative mysticism. "Marlowe," her play, dealt with the life and death of the ill-fated dramatist.

Her Ladyship—Are you then so much mine?
Marlowe— Thine and the Sun's!
Light draws me, and I follow. Drink my song.
Grow fair, you sovran flower, with earth and air;
Sip from the last year's leaves their memories
Of April, May, and June, their summer joy,
Their lure for every nightingale, their longing;
Fill you with rain and sunset; live and thrill,
Whose master-work is only to exist!
Terrible Beauty, that can so enthrall
And bind the service of all elements,
As they were serving-maidens: eyes and mouth,
You give back to the silence of the Earth
Whose treasury you beggar, only silence.

And the ending in the tavern, *Marlowe* with his own dagger in his heart, done with the straight-moving, tense method—it is like Sardou.

As to what she could do with the sonnet form, judge from this:

SONNET IN A GARDEN

Dumb Mother of all music, let me rest
On thy great heart while summer days pass by;

While all the heat up-quivers, let me lie
Close gathered to the fragrance of thy breast.
Let not the pipe of birds from some high nest
Give voice unto a thought of melody,
Nor gleaming clouds afloat along the sky
Meet any wind or promise from the West
Save for that grassy breath that never mars
The peace, but seems a musing of thine own.
Keep thy dear silence. So, embraced, alone,
Forgetful of relentless prison-bars,
My soul shall hear all songs, unsung, unknown,
Uprising with the breath of all the stars.

Cawein, whose life was passed chiefly in cities, had for nature the curiously receptive and passionate heart with the power of response in a kind of loving, lingering detail, that has been from the beginning typical of one division of American poets; only Cawein had it in the new manner—the manner of potent suggestion rather than attempted description, the feeling of the scene rather than verbal photography. He believed as he sang, that

There is no rhyme that is half so sweet
As the song of the wind in the rippling wheat;
There is no metre that's half so fine
As the lilt of the brook under rock and vine.

No man has better found the poetry that lies in the simplest thing that nature does. In "The Path to the Woods," for instance.

It led me with its innocence,
As childhood leads the wise,
With elbows here of tattered fence,
And blue of wildflower eyes;
With whispers low of leafy speech,
And brook-sweet utterance;
With bird-like words of oak and beech,
And whisperings clear as Pan's.

It led me with its childlike charm,
As candor leads desire,
Now with a clasp of blossomy arm,
A butterfly kiss of fire;
Now with a toss of tousled gold,
A barefoot sound of green,
A breath of musk, or mossy mold,
With vague allurements keen.

George Sterling, typical of the new spirit, one of its most careful, conscientious exponents, a poet of the clearest charter, whose work was always like cameos, like the finest mosaic, passed while he was still in his full career. The specimen I take of his peculiarly faultless artistry is one of his sonnets, "The Black Vulture." *

Aloof upon the day's immeasured dome,
He holds unshared the silence of the sky.
Far down his bleak, relentless eyes descry
The eagle's empire and the falcon's home—
Far down, the galleons of sunset roam;
His hazards on the sea of morning lie;
Serene, he hears the broken tempest sigh
Where cold sierras gleam like scattered foam.
And least of all he holds the human swarm—

* *From "Selected Poems of George Sterling" by permission A. M. Robertson, Publisher, San Francisco, Copyright, 1911.*

Unwitting now that envious men prepare
To make their dream and its fulfillment one,
When, poised above the caldrons of the storm,
Their hearts, contemptuous of death, shall dare
His roads between the thunder and the sun.

The centrifugal spreading, like waves in a pond, of a devotional attention toward poetry was accompanied by a great increase in the number of new poetical works, and, in all men's eyes, by a great increase in the number of American periodicals that had only the poetical mission. In 1928, to cite but one illustration, the New York Public Library was regularly receiving twenty-nine magazines consecrated to this aim. One of them, devoting a monthly issue to the recent verse work of one Western state, printed two hundred and twenty examples.

Progression so rapid is usually fringed with extravagances, though in this case, nothing that worked a lasting harm.

At the beginning of the new period, which was more than a renaissance, we were all for fixed forms, and overdid them. Every high-school journal resounded with ballads, rondeaus and triolets, sometimes of a propitious merit, sometimes otherwise. Fashions in literature are much as fashions used to be in clothes; a lunge in one direction and then a

lunge in reverse. Reaction from too much formalism lunged now toward no form at all and the world was regaled with the singular manifestation that is called free verse.

As this cacophony so plainly falls outside the definition with which we started it might well be omitted from consideration here but for the extraordinary space it long occupied in the public view and for the unusual length of its visitation. As a psychological curiosity it may be deemed of incomparable interest; as literature it has another aspect. Luckily, what free verse really means, the essence and heart of it, is not a matter of opinion but of cold fact; an opinion of it would hardly be worth bothering with here. The fact involved stares at us, first blankly, then comically, as soon as the obvious test is applied. Suppose this morning we were to read in our newspaper this paragraph:

"He rounded the house toward the road seaward. They saw him between the low oak-bush and the log wall, moving his arms as if a multitude waited outside the gap-roofed shed."

Not one human being, however minded about art and literature, and whether reading these lines once and indifferently, or many times and heedfully, would imagine them to

be poetry. Not one would fail to scorn the suggestion that they should be called poetry.

Yet restore these lines to the book from which they were taken and to the manner in which they were printed there, and observe:

He rounded the house toward the road seaward.
They saw him between the low oak-bush and the log wall,
Moving his arms as if a multitude waited
Outside the gap-roofed sheds.

Now, by this simple magic, the lines heretofore merest prose are in the view of this delusion transformed into unquestionable poetry and the writer of them is crowned with a prize.

To accept such a doctrine we must believe that the only difference between poetry and prose lies in a sufficiency of capital letters in the printer's type case. At once then, with only the printer's artful aid, any work hitherto classed as prose becomes poetry, from the Germania of Tacitus to the reports of the stock market.

Free verse was not the only emotional malaria that came with this period and had its febrile exaltation and passed. For a time we were hot upon the trail of the adjective and furnished forth our poetic tables with fan-

tastical banquets of strange verbal dishes. This quaint faddism went so far that poems came to be judged upon no other basis than their supply of epithets that sent us scurrying to the dictionary, sometimes to search in vain there, sometimes to be rewarded with discoveries more startling than joyous.

Other phases of the *Jugend Bewegung* were not so diverting. A cynical writer of the times discerned a new definition of poetry. He said it meant two quatrains, the first incomprehensible, the second indecent. This, in turn, was a gross exaggeration. Yet it must be admitted that among the practitioners of emancipated thought were some that went far, being adrift between mysticism and pornography, and others that went still farther. Some of their verse making was mawkish, some morbid, and some plainly pathological, with revelations of stigmata familiar to alienists. Yet the bulk of the poetic output remained uninfected by all this, and, considering the times, was conspicuously wholesome and sound.

Eroticism passed, or was doomed to pass, with other inebriations that followed the great war, including an uncomely excess of introspection. The world was not really concerned with the physiologies of our mental

processes, though for a time we believed that it was. The editors of a magazine of large general circulation having had their attention called to this phenomenon kept record of the verses submitted to them for publication and found that of one hundred offerings, sixty-four began with "My heart" or "My soul" or had one or the other phrase in the first line. Two years later they would have found none.

But one thing the new ferment brought forth seems to have endured and be likely to endure. There came a great access of mysticism, some of it reflected from Emerson, some of it spontaneous, often most beautifully and convincingly set forth, so that it began strongly and on the whole admirably to mark this era of our literature.

Of the body of verse of a permanent interest developed in the later days, the first characteristic shown was a great increase in authority. Vanished were the timidity of other days and the spirit of imitation. Without fear, in the confidence that comes of reason and mastery, the poet now spoke forth his inner self.

Second, the texture of the verse grew always more firm and closely woven, more vivid, better designed, better fashioned. There

was manifested a much more skillful use of the resources of the art, a growth in verbal expertness, so that the word should transfer exactly the desired shade of feeling. Next, the sentimentality that had been with us so long seemed dying a lingering death, and in its place came a new perception of the deeper problems, mysteries and passionate tragedies of this life of ours. The outlook upon life became much broader, graver, more sympathetic, more understanding. If, in general, poems of nature dropped a little from the pre-eminence they once had held, they were succeeded by poems of a feeling more directly related to man and his path through the world. In all ways and however plumed, the flights of our poetry have become higher, more certain, more brilliant, better considered, better controlled—and much more numerous!

We have then the anomaly with which we started. The nation wherein materialism is believed to have reached its farthest advance shows at the same time along two lines the greatest cultural activity—the greatest, and, what is more important, the most widely diffused. The progress of poetry through the schools has almost kept step with the march of music. In no other country, with the pos-

sible exception of Japan, does poetry seem to mean so much to the generality of people. Great in bulk, the annual American output of verse is in its average quality of an unchallenged competence.

The fact may be an enigma to the foreign observer, but fact it remains, bearing two possible suggestions.

First, that despite all efforts to revive or perpetuate the colonial spirit, there is surely developing the American individuality.

Second, that since the product of this generation is so remarkable, what of good and enduring may not be expected of the next?

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